

travel to their countries was suddenly on the rise. It increased unbelievably. Steamship companies and air lines offered rates, service and schedules too tempting to resist. Tourists returning to this country wanted to hear nothing but the enchanting rhythms of South and Central America. By the time I opened at the Waldorf-Astoria, travel to the tropics was of boom proportions.

As the popularity and prestige of my music increased, a nationwide demand arose for similar orchestras. Several musicians, formerly in my employ, organized their own Latin-American bands. In each instance, they were formed with my guidance and encouragement.

True, I have stressed twenty-four-hours-a-day showmanship throughout my career, yet this would not have been enough to establish success. There is no substitute for expert musicianship. I demand it of every man I employ. I know what I want and expect anyone playing for me to be capable of delivering it.

My arrangements are conceived to produce popular, melodic appeal. Compared to the limited few who pay to hear a violin virtuoso, the thousands who flock to hear my concert orchestra is overwhelming and inspiring. Not even the massive Hollywood Bowl is large enough to accommodate the crowds.

As an impressionable boy playing first violin in the orchestra of the Teatro Nacional in Havana, I dreamed of being a great artist like my friend Enrico Caruso and attract thousands and thousands of people like he did in whatever city he performed. At that time, artistry alone was what seemed all important. I was too young to grasp the need of personality as well, too immature to realize that Caruso's fame was dependent also upon his colorful behavior. It is true of any celebrated artist—Lauritz Melchior, José Iturbi, Lily Pons, Tallulah Bankhead. Without color you cannot fully succeed, no matter how well-trained your talents.

As a boy, I paid no attention to individuality. I did, how-



*When I was presented to the king, he burst out laughing.*



as compared to the rumba, in which rhythm predominates. The rhythm is supplemented by gourds with loose seeds inside of them (maracas) and claves (two sticks) and bongos (little drums).

The national instrument in Cuba, as in Spain, is the guitar originally adapted from its crude monochord Arabian ancestor, the guitar. 'Tis said no woman sleeps so soundly that the twang of a guitar will not bring her to the window! In Cuban music, its lute-like effect is sometimes altered by transposing the 6 strings—No. 1 being placed alongside No. 4, 2 with 5, and 3 with 6 (the base). The effect is plaintive and beautiful. A curious tempo is produced by employing two tempos, 3/4 and 2/4 at the same time. The tempo of certain of the *musica tipica* is difficult for Americans to reproduce. The gaita, a sort of Galician bagpipe similar in form and tone to a Scotch bagpipe, is almost as beloved as the guitar in the Latin countries, but is strictly Spanish.

Music lovers are always interested in the crude instruments of Cuba's descendants of early African slaves and in the odd syncopation produced by them. The reverberating drum (tambor) is the best known of these instruments. There are many varieties of it. Some are made of kegs or logs, over the ends of which green goatskins have been stretched, then allowed to dry and shrink. Others are of cocoanut shells, still others of gourds ornamented with bright brass tacks disposed in various patterns.

An African will rub two sticks together, draw a bow across a plank, get a dry jawbone of a mule and rasp wood or metal across the teeth to hear them rattle, use a matraca, a sort of nutmeg grater, pots, kettles, frying pans or any other utensil that will produce a discordant sound.

The marimba, which is an important instrument in my orchestra, dates back, amazingly enough, to 3000 B.C. It is traceable from the Cretes, Egyptians, the Chinese, the Javanese, the Africans and thence to Central and South America. It is interesting also that Yoichi Hiraoka, a Japa-



nese of New York City, is one of the outstanding marimba players of the world and once gave a recital at Town Hall featuring the works of Handel, Beethoven, Hayden, Bach, Mozart and Rameau, which is still spoken of enthusiastically.

Furthermore, there was the orchestra of one hundred marimbas that played at the Chicago World's Fair in 1933 and then made a triumphant tour of the world in 1935. This unprecedented orchestra gave a program of Tschaikowsky, Mozart, Wagner and Franck.

I am financially interested in several business enterprises in no way associated with music or the entertainment field. For example, I have a rather large financial stake in "Cugat's Nugats." Before the war, while in California, I was asked by John L. Stone, who had made a fortune growing fruits and nuts, to go into the candy business with him, specializing in "Cugat's Nugats." California tops all other states in its fruit and nut acreage. Although the war postponed inauguration of our plan, we now have our own candy factory in Los Angeles and, in "Cugat's Nugats," in all fruit flavors and rum besides, we are producing as delicious a box of candy as can be bought. When Walter Winchell heard of "Cugat's Nugats," he quipped, "I always knew he was nutty!"

To commemorate my venture into the candy business, I composed and introduced a new rumba, appropriately called, "Cugat's Nugats." And I assure you, it does not sound like a "singing commercial."

"Cugat's Tumblers" have also made their appearance. They are tall plastic glasses upon which are color caricatures of Latin-American dancers drawn by me. Ideal for long, tall rum drinks or as inducement for the kiddies to drink their milk.

From a tie-up with a perfume manufacturing company which sells a specialty called Cugat's Dream of Love, I realize a modest profit for the use of my name.

I have a financial interest in a company manufacturing sunglasses which bear my name. What next? Oh, yes! The new Cugat jacket and the Chiwawa shirt.

In Hollywood, when a new player is signed, she is at once photographed with an already established star whose name is a household word. The public, upon seeing the published photograph of the new name linked with the familiar one, automatically accepts the newcomer with good will. The same is equally true in everyday business. That is the reason manufacturers approach me about candy, sunglasses, tumblers and perfume. Not that I am an expert on how they should be made.

Whatever energy, ambition and common sense I possess I inherited from my father, a true Catalanian. In Spain, the Catalanians are its most progressive people and have been throughout the years. It is truly said in Spain that Catalan is the tail that wags the dog.

# 20

My oldest brother, Francis, after conferring with Albert, Henry and me, recently visited my parents and sister at their home in Havana, Cuba. He flew each way, leaving and returning to La Guardia Field as if Cuba were little more than a stone's throw away. His purposeful visit was to arrange for our folks to move permanently to California where all of the Cugats could again live happily together. There are distressingly few years left for this family reunion to be possible. My father is now eighty years of age, my mother seventy-five, and old age is an incurable disease.

My sister, Regina, her shattered health all but rebuilt, has unselfishly devoted her life to their care and comfort. A change in routine and scenery for her is overdue and certainly advisable. Loving soul that she is, Regina has found outright pleasure in keeping house for them. Indeed, to the extent that she has never once been even slightly tempted to leave and be on her own. Her entire happiness is snugly built upon her quiet, invariable life with my aging parents. She desires no part—and I do not blame her—of the changeableness of marital life. To her, worldly gains and peace of mind, like politics and religion, simply do not mix. Although blithely at ease in her saintly, sheltered existence, my brothers and I are thinking of Regina—thinking ahead to the time when our parents will have passed on and a new source of happiness for her must be found.

My father, now too weary for work, spends his time in recollection and narration. His stories grow taller and taller

with each telling. His opinions at last are settled once and for all; he has no new conquests to make; no brilliant ideas to execute. Time and effort are precious. He no longer wants to face danger or surmount obstacles, as in his vigorous Gerona past. No, old age is wise for itself.

He and my mother have lately complained of being lonesome; a positive sign of their declining years. My sister's companionship, esteemed as it is, seems not quite comforting enough as time runs out.

The short-wave radio set I sent that has kept them in close touch with my activities through the years has lost its charm. They now retire earlier and miss many of my programs because of the late hour they reach Havana. I correspond regularly, but letters no longer are adequate either. My father still replies, but letter-writing is now a straining task for his tired eyes. He and my mother are anxious for the family to be reunited. Since it is impractical for my brothers and me to live in Cuba, Francis journeyed there to plan for them to live with us in California. Incidentally, there is another member in our family now—the former Lorraine Allen. Yes, Lorraine and I were married in Philadelphia in the early part of 1948.

We are now searching in Hollywood for a house large enough for us all and when we have found it my parents and sister will be brought from Havana.

Deeds are love and not sweet words.

My first thought was to buy a house in Cuernavaca, Mexico, which, to me, is the garden spot of the world. A three hours' drive from Mexico City, it is the capital of Morelos State. The climate is temperate twelve months of the year. Cuernavaca, meaning "cow's horn," is a cheerful, combination health-and-pleasure resort. Everyone living there, according to its pardonably boastful chamber of commerce, is in good health and happy. However, living there would be impractical and inconvenient for our business endeavors. Francis, a color expert, is now a busy executive

of the Technicolor Corporation with offices in Hollywood, many miles from Cuernavaca, and must constantly be on hand. Hollywood, too, is now my pivotal point, since I am under a long-term contract to Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. It is the point of origin of my broadcasts. I also do my recordings for Columbia in Hollywood. Henry's duties can be transferred to Hollywood without much inconvenience. Albert, being a free-lance commercial artist, can easily operate from there, too. Besides, Hollywood is an important part of Los Angeles, fastest growing metropolitan city in the United States, and I want us to be on hand to share in its delights and progress.

From my mother, I am sure, came my desire to have all of us Cugats again under the same roof. She implanted—as did my father my grit, determination and will to succeed—a strong, active love of family and home. My mother made home the most comforting place I could ever be. It was the one haven where understanding and consolation could be found, the one place where my wounds, in flesh or in spirit, would be soothed and healed.

Henry has been living in Mexico City, working as my general representative, attending to all of my business below the border pertaining to radio, recording, motion pictures and personal appearances. Henry, by the way, never married. Like my sister Regina, he has never been in love, nor shown any inclination of succumbing. His preference for bachelorhood is genuinely sincere. I doubt if ever he will take a wife. Which is, indeed, a pity. Francis, Albert and I, ill-fatedly, have never had a child. We hope he will change his attitude, fall in love, marry and be blessed with a son. My father has long hoped to be a grandfather. If he is to have his wish, the likelihood is that Henry, being the youngest, will be the proud father. Meanwhile, we have distant and prolific relatives in Barcelona already perpetuating the name of Cugat.

Regarding the name, I had a shock upon seeing in a New

York City newspaper an advertisement for "Cugat's Dancing School," teaching the rumba, samba and tango. Friends and business acquaintances at once thought either I or one of my brothers had become a dancing teacher. Since, in all of the United States, there are no other Cugats outside of ourselves, I checked, found the dancing teacher's name is Arturo Cugat, that he is an Italian, cannot speak Spanish—let alone Catalanian—but has legally taken unto himself the name of Cugat. He is in no way related. I have never met the man and have no intention of so doing. My hope is that, even though he has the right to use the name of Cugat, no one will be misled into thinking he actually is a Cugat.

The fox is cunning, but he is more cunning who catches him.

I once said, lounging leisurely in my Beverly Hills home, that I would rather play "Chiquita Banana" and have my swimming pool than play Bach and starve. There was no flippancy in that remark. It was pure common sense. For back in Washington Heights, when I started out as a hopeful concert violinist, I soon learned it was a limited field, with only the very top artists enjoying a sizable income. For all others, it was a disheartening, pinchpenny struggle. There were few profitable concerts even for an above-average violin virtuoso. Moreover, to add to my grief, the critics were set in their opinion that I had not the mastery of Kreisler, Elman and Heifetz and therefore never could be one of the foremost concert violinists.

Since I could not be satisfied with second fiddle, my way of life and its goal had to be changed. It took time, as you know, but eventually the renown I failed to achieve as a concert violinist I did acquire, more outstandingly and fruitfully, as a maestro of Latin-American music.

When I organized my six-piece, tango-rumba band in Los Angeles, Latin-American music was of no importance in America. Luckily, I had no sooner begun playing the intriguing music of our Good Neighbors when, propitiously,

**1** I have much to tell that is surprising, amigos. Many amusing stories to confide, not all about myself, as you might expect, but about my family and friends as well; about the people who have meant most to me in my adventurous quest for the three things all Spaniards desire—«*salud, dinero y amor.*» Which, for you who flunked high school Spanish, means health, wealth and love. Yes, amigos, I have much to tell. So relax. Light up a cigarette, pour yourself a long drink and lend your good ear to Cugat.

At the turn of the century, January 1, 1900, I was born in picturesque Gerona, Spain. As usual, one good turn deserved another. My extraordinary birth date brought about the immediate release from prison of my father, Juan Cugat de Bru, being held in custody by the royal government for rebellious talk. The unusual date also won future exemption for myself and my two brothers, Francis and Albert, from dreaded military training to which all Spanish youths were then subjected. Next time you are dying a thousand deaths on New Year's Day, cheer up. Remember it is Cugat's birthday.

January 1, 1900. A significant day for me. And, of course, for my imprisoned father, too. It was an omen of more good fortune to come but not to arrive, unfortunately, until after years of humiliation, discouragement and what easily might have been mistaken for despair.

I was baptized Francisco de Asis Javier Cugat Mingall de Bru y Deulofeo! The padre almost ran out of water on that one. However, in Spanish-speaking countries, where tradition and heritage mean so much, everyone has at least three

names—his own, his father's and his mother's. Often, as in my case, his grandfather's and his grandmother's name as well. The Cugat is my father's name. The Mingall is my mother's name. The De Bru is my father's mother's name and the Deulofeo is my mother's father's name. My friends call me X for short.

I am a direct descendant of Father Francisco Cugat, for whom the town of San Cugat del Vallés, nine miles north of Barcelona, is named. Father Cugat was a saintly little priest who, during the Spanish Inquisition, sheltered twenty-five Jews in his rectory so that their lives might be spared. The bigoted townspeople learned of it, set fire to the rectory and burned to death the twenty-five Jews and Father Francisco Cugat. When I see some of the rumba dancers in the Chez Paree and Havana-Madrid I don't know how it could happen to a direct descendant of Father Cugat. But, as they say in Spanish, «¡Así es la vida!»

I was baptized a Roman Catholic in the magnificent cathedral of Gerona. Although a good man at heart, my father, who had lost his religion, stood outside the cathedral while the sacramental ceremony was performed. He had no objection to anyone else in the family going to church, but he himself no longer took part in the actual practice of religion. Even on such an occasion as my baptismal day, he still would not go inside the cathedral. Perhaps, if it had rained cats and dogs . . . .

My father was the most determined and persistent man I have ever known. And, believe me, I've known a song plugger or two. He ran an electrical supplies shop and was the best electrician in Gerona. I best remember him as a vigorous disciple of democracy, forever fighting for it in a land, mind you, where the king was beloved. That made no difference to my father. He denounced the throne, its doctrines, pitied the people and king alike with every breath he took.

He was constantly, you might say, causing short circuits and blowing fuses with indignant government authorities.



They became less and less indulgent of him. That is why he happened to be feasting on bread and water on the day of my birth.

My father would not have been on hand to comfort my mother if the good king, Alfonso XIII, honoring the new century, had not proclaimed, among other national favors, a pardon for all in jail except murderers and such. Which my father was not, although their accusations sounded as if he were far worse. The release, hoped the king, would reform the prisoners' way of life. Perhaps it changed the others, but my father remained as adamant against monarchy as the day they cast him into jail for his attacks against it.

Because father was so impelling a character, his look, now softened, was severe and belligerent. Even his mustache shot upward at the ends, sharp and defiant.

My early childhood in Gerona was not especially eventful. Nor very memorable. My father's activities, as you may detect, overshadowed all else. It is chiefly what he did that I recall.

However, as a small, imaginative child, I remember digging like mad for treasure with my brothers, Francis and Albert. (We got our primary school training, incidentally, from the Marist Brothers in Gerona. Disciplinarians to the fullest, but as educators they ranked with the renowned Jesuits.) Almost on the outskirts of Gerona were the eerie ruins of an ancient castle or church. We were not sure which. We believed if we dug deep enough we would find treasure chests filled with jewels and gold and silver coins.

Our daily digging was finally rewarded. We found something. Not the jewels and gold and silver coins, but a stone passageway which we discovered—with help from some curious passers-by—led to several underground cells. Dungeons, whispered the townspeople, that had been used during the Spanish Inquisition. The clergy, hearing of our discovery, reproached my father for allowing us to desecrate the ruins,

suspended us from school and brought abruptly to an end our adventurous treasure hunting.

I also remember how our mother, in keeping with the rules and regulations of the Marist Brothers Academy, dressed Albert and me in red shirts with Eton collars, flowing white ties, dark blue knee-length trousers with a white sash and silver buckle, blue socks and black low shoes. To top it off, we wore large, white pancake sailor hats with blue ribbons dangling in back.

The day Albert and I made our First Holy Communion in the cathedral, a white arm band with tassel was added to our colorful attire. I was too young and distracted to appreciate what a holy and sacred day it was.

My father's closest friend, José Balmaña, a wealthy carriage maker in La Bisbal, was unable to attend the impressive giving of our First Holy Communion at solemn High Mass in the cathedral. As an expedient, my mother arranged that on the following Sunday we would visit him at his home in La Bisbal, ten miles away, dressed exactly as we were when we received the sacrament.

A narrow-gauge railroad ran between Gerona and La Bisbal. The ride on the miniature train itself rivaled in anticipation our day with José Balmaña. On Sundays there was only one train. We arose at daybreak, attended early Mass, ate a hurried breakfast, all to be on time for its departure. Oddly enough, there was an unbelievable mistake in my father's timing. We missed the train. However, except for one short outburst of anger, my father remained calm and undaunted. The fault is as great as he that commits it.

He walked quickly, but smoothly, to a near-by stable and hired a donkey with *cestas* and attendant to transport us to La Bisbal. Better late than never. The *cestas* were basket seats, hung one on either side of the donkey. The attendant, a bent-over old man, was garbed in a black duster and beret. Our father entrusted us to his care and waved good-by. He was glad to be free of his predicament.

Albert, stiff in all of his finery, sat rigidly on one side of the donkey and I, equally stiff in mine, sat proudly erect on the other. It was a bright, cloudless day. No one in Gerona could possibly have missed Albert and me as we passed, bumping along on our donkey conveyance. I can still hear the cheers and catcalls. Still feel the bumps.

The attendant, much to the donkey's delight and our displeasure, walked slowly and deliberately. Every step was with concern. I thought we would never get there. Yet I was too self-conscious to call out and ask the dried-up old man to stop by the roadside and let me relieve myself. Instead I sweat and suffered.

The day was almost over by the time we arrived at José Balmaña's pretentious home in La Bisbal. He greeted us with stirring enthusiasm. His eyes sparkled as if we had just returned victorious from the war in Morocco. His entire family and legions of neighbors, it seemed, were also there to make much of Albert and me. I soon forgot the discomfit of our long, irksome journey on the donkey's back. But please, amigos, don't ever ask me to play "The Donkey Serenade!"

Our host had prepared a feast that made our eyes pop. Albert and I were the guests of honor and sat with him at the head of the table. We were toasted and songs were sung to us. I had never before felt so grown up and important.

José Balmaña took pictures of us in our First Holy Communion outfits and assured us that now we would get to heaven. We were angels without wings, he said. He asked God to bless us with good fortune, for knowledge is *not* enough. José Balmaña was not the sort of man who'd stand outside a cathedral until it rained cats and dogs.

When the festivities ended, it was too late to return that night to Gerona. José Balmaña telephoned my mother. We were going to stay over. We would return the following

day, adding further expense to my father's already costly mistake.

It was my first experience of being away from home overnight. I did not like it. John Howard Payne had something when he wrote "There's No Place Like Home." I was terribly frightened in the strange room and unfamiliar bed, although I slept beside Albert. Sudden noises, harmless though they were, kept me awake with a pounding heart. I prayed daybreak would come sooner than ever before, but my prayers weren't answered. And furthermore, for all one's early rising, it dawns none the sooner.

Jogging back to Gerona on the donkey's back was doubly annoying, for we hated to leave and knew what deep-seated torture to expect on the road. I remember how the old attendant mumbled all the way that he had not slept well in the quarters José Balmaña had provided for him. The field mice had kept him awake sniffing at his feet.

Arriving in Gerona, our spirits were well in keeping with the dreary, overcast day. Our father, mother, grandfather, aunt and Francis were out in front of the house to greet us and help us out of the basket seats. Our eyes were heavy with dust and lack of sleep. My mother soon had Albert and me fed and comfortably relaxed in our own soft bed. I remember yet how comfortable it felt. José Balmaña may have given us the feeling of importance. But my mother, as always, gave us the feeling of comfort and security.

I gave no indication of being interested in music in those early years in Gerona. I had no musical instrument. I had no toy that resembled a musical instrument. Besides, my mother never sang me to sleep. My musical career was to start shortly, however.

In his fight against monarchy, my father, without knowing it, had himself become somewhat of a dictator. At least toward his family. His word was absolute law to my mother. Naturally, we all obeyed it willingly. If he said it was raining, although the sun was shining, to my trusting mother it



*January 1, 1900. A significant day for me.*



was a thunderstorm. She loved him dearly and was utterly devoted. If he was strict, if he was demanding, extreme and hot tempered, always it was for the good of his family. Every move he made was aimed in that direction. For an outsider his stern, dictatorial procedure was difficult to accept. His family knowingly felt otherwise. At least, that's what we kept telling ourselves.

When I was four years old, the government authorities in Gerona, their patience exhausted, gave my rebellious father twenty-four hours to close up shop and get out of Spain. He was through shooting off sparks. They no longer would tolerate his contempt and allegations. They meant business. He knew there must be no further defiance. It was leave or be executed! And that's no exaggeration.

He was a practical man. Keeping alive was considerably more imperative than anything else he could think of. Dead men tell no tales. And he still had many to tell. He closed his electrical supplies shop; entrusted a friend to sell it. He hurriedly gathered us all together—my understanding mother; my three brothers (yes, another had been born), Francis, who was then eight years old, Albert, who was six, and little Henry, who was one; my aging grandfather; my widowed aunt, who was my mother's all but twin sister; and me. We took no trunks, just quickly-gathered-together bundles. That's how fast we moved. Father simply dropped everything, including several well-chosen oaths, took no time for packing or neighborly farewells. The first boat had to be caught. He knew he must get out of Spain before another day passed. There are times when you must do what you do not want to do and for my father this was unmistakably one of them. Playing the dramatic departure for all it was worth, he vowed he would return.

My mother, her sister and my grandfather wept as we left Gerona. My brothers and I were then too young to appreciate its medieval beauty, its steep winding streets and archways, the grass growing between the stones of the pave-

Sixty-five buffeting days after leaving Barcelona—still en route to Mexico—we finally docked in Havana Harbor. On each of those sixty-five hang-overish days, seasick though we were, we thanked God to be safely away from Spain, first for our father's sake and second, for our own in again escaping future military training. You see, my brothers and I, owing to father's actions, no longer were exempt, no matter how extraordinary my birth date. My father's attitude had been so extraordinary plus as to cancel our privilege.

Spanish parents in those days feared military training, not through lack of patriotism, but because it meant having their sons automatically shipped off to the devastating and meaningless Fifty Years' War in Morocco. There was little fighting to be alarmed about. Rather it was the inescapable, incurable sickness of the hot, disease-infested land. That is why Spaniards tried, without loss of honor, to send their young sons to South America, Mexico or Cuba to escape the consequences of "military training" in godawful Morocco.

Since we were to be in port for a few hours, my father decided he would go ashore and see what Havana looked like. We worried when he left the *Maria Christina*, fearful lest it set sail before he returned. We just couldn't imagine getting along without him. He was truly a father in every sense of the word.

Being a warm day, naturally the first thing he did was to step into a café for a cool, refreshing drink. Not an alcoholic drink. My father never drank hard liquor. Nor smoked. And never allowed any of us the pleasures until we were well past twenty-one. I still feel strange with a highball in my hand in his presence. And although I was long on the air for Camel cigarettes, I myself never smoke.

At the bar, my father's friendliness and cold-sober eloquence struck decisively and profitably in his favor. One of the men with whom he talked, an executive of La Estrella Biscuit Company of Cuba, became so genuinely impressed



with his advanced views, background, electrical knowledge and the lighting installation he had done in Gerona, that he got the bright idea of offering my father the job of installing a modern electrical system in the factory. He would be paid sixty-five dollars a month, more money than he had ever earned. Furthermore, to make it more appealing, a friendly Catalan at the bar, spoke up about a fashionably furnished house my father could rent cheap.

Juan Cugat de Bru readily accepted, bowed politely, rushed back to the boat, briefly told us of the opportunity, announced that instead of going to Mexico we would live in Cuba and hurried us down the gangplank of the *Maria Christina* with our quickly-gathered-together bundles.

2 The friendly Catalan my father met in the fateful café immediately arranged for us to live at 3 Cerrada del Paseo, a dead-end street on the outskirts of Havana. It was a dead end in more ways than one. We were hardly there a month when a hurricane, one of the most ruthless ever experienced, furiously struck the City of Sugar, Rum and Spice. The ones you've seen in newsreels were sunny days in comparison. Our house was not well built. Like a Hollywood rumor, it had little foundation. I thought surely it would be blown over. In fact, my childish fear had me believing the hurricane was the end of the world. When the wind let up somewhat, instead of bringing relief it turned the rain into torrents. Rivers and lakes overflowed. As the waters rose, hopes dropped. Luckily, we had little furniture and belongings to damage. What we had, floated around on the pond that was once our ground floor.

A year later we moved for the better into two large rooms on the second floor of 95 Havana Street. The first floor was a small hardware store. But it in no way stifled the hominess of our new address.

My father, extremely busy and important with his brightening up of La Estrella Biscuit factory, was himself aglow, radiant with happiness. And so my mother's heartbeat was a happy one, too. It followed then that the rest of the family found life particularly joyful. The mood of Juan Cugat set the tempo, determined the pace, adjusted the entire family's dispositions. In his own two-room palace, he was king.

Among Spaniards the family is sacred. My father, as head, reigned supreme and unquestioned, like Señor Petrillo. To

this day it is the same. Ironically, our respect and loyalty were to blame for his becoming a reasonable facsimile of a dictator. The same reaction is true in all fathers of overly devoted Spanish families. My father knew well how we feared and respected him, that he could confidently enforce any decision, no matter how many teeth it had in it. Regardless, he never took advantage nor was unjust. He never made a habit of reaching for the razor strop.

Embroided as he once was in the politics of Gerona and Spain, my father soon became equally as heated in his discussions of governmental misbehavior in Havana and Cuba. To him who is determined, it remains only to act.

Across the street from where we lived was a guitar and violin maker's shop. The kindly owner's name was Salvador Iglesias. He came from Valencia and, to our knowledge, was the only violinmaker in Cuba. Since the instrument then was not popular with Cubans, his business was chiefly in guitars. Valencians were supposed to be the only craftsmen who knew how to make good guitars. As in Spain, the national instrument of Cuba is the guitar. It never caught my fancy. Why, I don't know. They say no woman sleeps so soundly that the twang of a guitar will not bring her to the window.

Iglesias, more the artist than the businessman, encouraged my childish curiosity about violins, always finding time to answer my questions. He, himself, preferred the violin to the guitar. In me he found a promising young disciple. Iglesias was the first person actually to do something about my interest in music. He gave me a present of a quarter-size violin, made by his own hands, when the Fiesta de Reyes was celebrated. In Cuba, as in every Latin-American country, Fiesta de Reyes, observed on January sixth, is similar to Christmas Day in the United States, for on this day gifts are given in honor of the Three Kings who brought treasures to the newborn Saviour. Don't ask me their names. That's one for "Information, Please."



*If my father said it was raining, although the sun was shining, to my trusting mother it was a thunderstorm.*



When Salvador Iglesias gave me the miniature violin, the birth of the rumba took place. Had Iglesias been a shoemaker, druggist or grocer there would have been a miscarriage of destiny. My life would have been entirely different. And, as you can bet, so would Arthur Murray's. I might be working in a Super Market, Arthur might still be teaching the old-fashioned waltz.

Four months after Salvador Iglesias gave me the quarter-size violin I was able to play, among other simple pieces, "The Merry Widow Waltz."

I would play frequently in a well-stocked candy store down the street. The shopkeeper and customers, more amused than enthralled, would reward me with candy. More than the sweets, I enjoyed their applause and encouragement.

When my father noticed how much I enjoyed the violin, how, without lessons, I was able to make music, he decided that I should be a musician. That I should start at once taking music lessons at the Centro de Dependientes.

Centro de Dependientes was an educational institution formed by the progressive businessmen of Havana. It was truly a benevolent organization. Members and their children could better prepare themselves in the arts and sciences for a fuller and happier life. Classical courses were taught for the small fee of one dollar and fifty cents a month. This also included medical care and hospitalization, as we know it here today, and the use of a gymnasium and playground, besides. Centro de Dependientes was a nonprofit institution, staffed with the best available teachers of modern methods. My father enrolled us for the evening classes. Francis and Albert studied painting. I took up the general study of music. At Centro de Dependientes, first you were given a thorough knowledge of the art itself before you specialized. During all the time I was there, I did not take one specialized violin lesson. But I became a sort of Quiz Kid about music in general.

After a few months of attendance, I won a small prize, the competition being none too keen, as the most advanced student in my class. Whereupon my proud and elated father (the father in praising his son, extols himself) rewarded me with a half-size violin. Quite naturally, it was made by my good friend Iglesias.

From the Centro de Dependientes I went to the Peyrellade School of Music where, in recognition of my Quiz Kid aptitude, I received a full-course scholarship free.

Every city in Cuba had a *conservatorio*, *instituto*, *academia* or *escuela* for the teaching of fine music. Cubans, like Spaniards, are a songful people. Music is a highly developed Cuban characteristic, found in all classes. As Cervantes said, "When Cubans chant, they enchant."

My teacher at Peyrellade was Joaquin Molina, scholarly and unselfish. He was an inspiration from our first handshake. What I learned from him, I never had to unlearn. I wish all students of music were as lucky and could say the same. Molina fully mastered the art of teaching. Why he could even have taught Jack Benny "The Flight Of The Bumble Bee"!

All this while my father, expecting greater miracles, grew as impatient with my violin playing as the Gerona authorities once did with him. My success at the conservatory did not impress him, for he did not understand its meaning. It annoyed him to listen to me scratching along in practice. He used to say, "God save me from a bad neighbor and from a beginner on the fiddle!" He loathed the sound of the scales. For that matter, so did the rest of the family. All except my understanding mother. She arranged for me to practice well out of my father's hearing. Before him I played only melodies. Familiar melodies. It made him happy. Made him feel I was progressing. That is until he became aware that it would be years before I could contribute a single peso to the support of the family.

He soon bemoaned my love of music. Regretted I was not

talented along practical money-making lines. I looked for a job. I wanted to earn money, no matter how small the amount, to keep alive his interest in my music.

But there were no jobs for children. When my father learned that I had looked for one, he took me in his arms, cried, held me tight and told me to stick to my violin lessons.

My father, a studious man, never went to school. As a result, he had the audacity and dominance of most self-educated men. He did not accept the educational system of his day. He believed in prescribed study, concentration on only what interested one. General knowledge came automatically without training. He advised Francis to concentrate solely on painting and let other learning come as it would. Albert was to assist my father in his electrical work. I was to devote all my time to music, small boy though I was.

The oldest child in a Spanish family is given preference in all things. First come, first served. At fifteen, for example, Francis was thriftily sent to Rheims to study painting. He lived there with relatives for a year. He then went on to Paris to study at the Beaux-Arts. It was the voluntary burden of the stay-at-home Cugats to keep Francis sufficiently supported and reasonably contented. With Spanish girls it is the same. Only the eldest gets a new dress. The younger daughters inherit the older daughter's clothes. When she gets new things, they in turn get what she discards. My only sister, Regina, born soon after Francis left for Rheims, was as expensive to clothe and raise as her four brothers. Among Spaniards, the oldest child, upon the death of the father, is willed half and the other half is divided equally among the rest of the family. So you see what I mean about preference.

I did not stay long in grade school. I went no higher than the fifth grade. From there on, my mother and aunt bolstered my reading, writing, arithmetic, religion and good manners without letting it interfere with my concentration



ping throughout the entire program of silent pictures. There were four and five shows a day, each lasting two hours. We watched the screen as intently as we would a conductor's baton. As the mood of the movie changed, our music followed suit. When the action was slow, our playing was slow. When the characters moved fast, our music was quickly in step. The songs we played were usually classical and semi-classical. The pianist, Moises Simon, became one of Cuba's best-known composers. Remember "The Peanut Vendor"? That's one of his many hits.

It wasn't easy keeping pace with the early harum-scarum melodramas. Sometimes they got ahead of us, sometimes we got ahead of them. Travelogues were easiest to follow. We did our best playing for them since there was no changing mood and tempo every few seconds. For newsreels, we stuck pretty much to marches. For two-reel comedies, we unloosed our liveliest popular songs.

3 One of the few treasures my father took in our flight from Gerona was his uniform, sword and medal of the International Red Cross. The uniform was gray with red stripes and gold trimmings. The sword was strictly for show since no European uniform was complete without one. The medal had been awarded to my father for his furtherance of the Red Cross in Spain. He had a perfect right to wear all three and did, proudly.

Once we were securely established in Havana, he set out to organize the then sadly neglected Red Cross in Cuba. I remember he saw a Dr. Sanches-Fuentes. Together they drew up a plan of action. It went into effect at once with my father's formation of a bicycle brigade of over a hundred men, each with a first-aid kit. He drilled them to perfection in all phases of lifesaving and in what to do in other cases of emergency, childbirth included.

A taskmaster with his bicycle brigade, he disciplined them as he did his own family. The men understood, were receptive and proud of him for the recognition he had gained for them in Havana.

For example, his brigade, in its first official appearance, was the outstanding unit in the annual parade on the national holiday of El Grito de Baire, observed each October 10th. My father, sword on shoulder and medal on chest, led the cyclists. Unfortunately, it was a dismal, cloudy day, but the parade began as scheduled. Heavy rain fell shortly after it started. The downpour drenched the brigade and drowned my father's heart in the backwash of disappointment.

The storm grew worse. It suddenly took on cyclonic proportions. Before the crowds were safely dispersed, a colossal



*It was a torturous trip to La Bisbal, riding in baskets  
on a donkey's back.*



tidal wave, not uncommon in Cuba, smashed the city of Havana, inflicting casualties, panic and destruction. My father and his Red Cross unit immediately took over. His men worked feverishly and competently for twenty-four straight hours. Most victims were suffering from immersion, shock and fractures, all of which my father had trained his men to handle. Dr. Sanches-Fuentes later announced publicly that had it not been for the quick action of my father's brigade, most tidal wave casualties would have become fatalities.

Next morning at breakfast, my father made little of his heroic achievement. He changed the subject to my violin. He emphasized how I must continue to study hard. How I must keep up my good work. How I must never let him down. That only through complete concentration could I become the great violinist he expected me to be.

Joaquin Molina, thoroughly impressed with my progress as his student at the Peyrellade School Of Music, had me play small, informal concerts at the homes of his friends and fellow musicians. I was now using a full-size violin. I could play with ease or conviction any composition requested, no matter how difficult the fingering. My finger-stretching exercises had given me the hand of a man, the ability to handle the strings like an adult. The excessive time given each day to practice was showing results. Molina was irrepressibly proud. He vowed I was the best violinist he had ever heard, although at the time I was only eleven. However, I looked fifteen due to my height, thinness, thick hair and the heavy eyeglasses I wore. My appearance was more that of a student of mathematics or chemistry than of music.

I was an unbelievably serious-minded boy, as the family album pictures prove. I had the grim, set look of a seminarian. I seldom smiled. My sense of humor, now important to my career, was still to blossom. Continuous practice left no time for laughs. I never clowning or did silly things

as children always do. At eleven years of age, I was a sedate grownup, never having known the irresponsibility of care-free childhood or the joy of bubble gum!

Joaquin Molina, besides giving violin lessons, was concert master of the Teatro Nacional Symphonic Orchestra, adroitly conducted by Arturo Bovi, an Italian. Molina enthused over my mastery of the violin to Bovi. More to keep Molina happy rather than any aroused curiosity in me, Bovi arranged an audition.

It was not private. Bovi listened to me play at a regular rehearsal of his entire orchestra. Molina had coached me thoroughly for the opportunity. I also had the advantage of adolescent confidence and presumption. I was fully determined. It was my heritage. As the field, so the crops, as the father, so the sons.

While Conductor Bovi put me through the musical paces, I detected his delight in discovering that I played as Molina had promised. I was demonstrating, he later admitted, that outside of Molina, I was a better violinist than any in his orchestra.

When the long and exacting audition was finally over, Bovi threw his arms around me, kissed my cheek and declared I was to consider myself an honored member of his symphony. What's more, I was to be his first violinist under Concertmaster Molina.

I was measured for a Tuxedo. Because of my age, Conductor Bovi felt I should wear short pants, European style. The managers of the theater, Messrs. Misa and Valenzuela, true Cuban gentlemen and showmen of international repute, learning that Bovi had hired me to be his first violinist, regardless of my age, immediately capitalized on his extraordinary choice. I was fittingly publicized and advertised, in keeping with the dignity of Teatro Nacional.

I did not eat meals or mix socially with the other musicians. Only while actually rehearsing or performing was I accepted as one of them. Outside of that, in their eyes I

was a child, still too young for congenial companionship. My father, much to my embarrassment, called for me after the performance every night and escorted me home.

He did so because performances at the Teatro Nacional started at nine or nine-thirty and lasted until after midnight. The dinner hour in Cuba is later than in the United States, due primarily to the sun. Cuba, like Spain, is a country where life is adjusted to the blistering sun. Since its heat is unbearable almost every hour of the day most months of the year, the afternoon siesta while the sun is directly overhead is not for the lazy, but the wise. It follows lunch, of course, so activities do not resume again until three or four in the afternoon. That is why Cubans and Spaniards always have a late dinner and why shows cannot start conveniently until nine or nine-thirty. Even at that time, some theatergoers persist in arriving after the first act is started. And somehow they always have seats in the middle of a row.

The attractions at the Teatro Nacional were the very best available. Its astute managers, Misa and Valenzuela, combed the entire island of Cuba for exceptional talent but mostly imported outstanding artists from every entertainment center in the world, no matter how many miles away. They could well afford the expense involved. The Teatro Nacional was the largest and best-attended theater in Cuba. Like most Cuban theaters, it was constructed in the Spanish style. It was from Spain, by the way, that both Europe and America copied the seating arrangement for the modern theater.

The shows at the theater were mainly of a classical and international standard. Nevertheless, there was always enough of the semiclassical and of native folklore in its productions so that all classes would be pleased. Zarzuelas, for example, which are typical Spanish light operas, were frequently presented with local favorites. Cubans, being emotional, possess a strong seriocomic sense. They enjoy going to the theater, especially to the Teatro Nacional,

comparable in importance to Radio City Music Hall in New York.

The Teatro Nacional's most ambitious undertaking occurred a year after I joined its orchestra. The Metropolitan Opera Company, under the direction of Tullio Serafin and headed by such stars as Titta Ruffo, Claudia Muzio, Giovanni Zenatello (the husband, incidentally, of Barcelona's famous Maria Gay) and José Mardones, renowned Spanish basso, was brought from New York for a month's engagement. Serafin brought Hugo Reisenfeld as his concertmaster and several key musicians besides to augment our orchestra at the Teatro Nacional.

Conductor Serafin first met our orchestra at an early morning rehearsal. His opening remark, upon stepping up on the rostrum, was a demand to know what I, a child, was doing at a rehearsal of the symphonic orchestra of the Teatro Nacional! When Bovi attempted to explain that I was his first violinist, Serafin, thinking a joke was being played on him, angrily stepped off the rostrum. Molina immediately joined Bovi in insisting it was no joke, that I actually was first violinist. Serafin was finally persuaded to return to the rostrum. He at once requested me to arise and play a most difficult violin exercise, one that only a master of the instrument could do. His request did not upset me. I was 100 per cent my father's son. I welcomed the challenge. Fully relaxed, I began his choice of exercise and had played but a third when Serafin raised his hand, smiled, bowed graciously to me and said, "Excellent, my boy! Excellent!" We then proceeded happily with his first rehearsal of the Teatro Nacional orchestra.

Most of the famous operas were presented by the Metropolitan Opera Company during its month's stay. The repertoire included *Carmen*, naturally, and *Othello*, *Aïda*, *La Bohème*, *La Traviata*, *Cavalleria Rusticana*, *Tosca*, *Faust*, *Madame Butterfly*, *Rigoletto* and *The Barber of Seville*. People came from all parts of the island of Cuba. It was a



busy and flourishing month for the merchants of Havana. Hotels, restaurants, cafés and stores were packed day and night. The Mardi gras spirit prevailed. An opera was presented every night except Sunday, with matinees on Wednesday and Saturday. I, through the management's generosity, was able to get free tickets for my father and family to attend all of the performances. I was averaging eight dollars a night in the orchestra. Most of it was sent to Paris to pay for Francis' tuition at the Beaux-Arts.

Two memorable incidents occurred during the opera season. The first was during a performance of *Aïda*, just before the final curtain in the death scene where Aïda comes to the entombed Rhadames, played that performance by Genaro de Tura, a two-hundred-pound, overly dramatic tenor. Aïda, as the story goes, had chosen to die with him of suffocation in the airless vault beneath the Temple of Ptah. As they sang their farewell duet, Aïda was the first to collapse and die. The huge, two-hundred-pound De Tura then staggered dramatically around her lifeless form before taking his last gasp. He misjudged where he was to fall and his enormous weight fell heavily upon the stomach of the dead Aïda. Back to life with a piercing shriek came Aïda, her arms and bare legs shooting high into the air, as the audience roared hysterically. The final curtain stopped further embarrassment for the artists. The audience, suddenly sympathetic, rose and begged for a curtain call, giving De Tura and his Aïda greater acclaim than if the unfortunate incident had not happened.

The second event which I'll never forget occurred during a performance of *Rigoletto*, with Titta Ruffo in the title role. Again it happened in the final scene, the one in which Rigoletto, hunchbacked court jester, is dragging about the sack containing the body of his murdered daughter, Gilda. The soprano playing the role of Gilda was buxom and temperamental and insisted to the stage manager that since her voice was not to be heard in that particular scene a



*The family arrives in Havana on the Maria Christina.*



**4** The Metropolitan Opera Company, again under the baton of Tullio Serafin, returned the following year for a month's engagement at the Teatro Nacional, intent on repeating the success of its initial visit. Just to make sure, the Metropolitan brought as its star the great Enrico Caruso.

To pay the renowned tenor's fabulous salary, drastic economies were necessary with the rest of the opera company. Consequently, it was not as well balanced a group as that of the first year when Titta Ruffo, Claudia Muzio, Giovanni Zenatello and José Mardones headed the Metropolitan's singers. For this second year's engagement, the only artist with a generally known name was Enrico Caruso. An all-star supporting cast was needless expense since Caruso alone was sufficient to bring in the pesos.

Up until that time Enrico Caruso was the most famous celebrity to perform in Cuba. The Cuban government outdid itself to honor the man with the greatest voice in all the world. He was treated more royally than a king of old. The management of the theater stifled its pride with unheard of concessions and favors for Caruso. Lana Turner could have got no more.

His arrival had been heralded for months in advance. When he at last trod down the gangplank into Havana's official welcome, the stirred-up populace literally went mad with joy. Conga lines were started everywhere. Caruso, accustomed to acclaim, took it affably. Much larger cities than Havana had paid him far greater tributes. But none, I am sure, more sincere and noisy.

My first face-to-face meeting with Enrico Caruso was in

Havana's beautiful Parque Central. He was alone, walking briskly, viewing the sights like any other tourist. I joined the crowd of curious people following him. His shoes began to hurt. He sat down on a park bench and unlaced them. Although fully aware of being on public view, Caruso raised his eyebrows, smiled and took off his shoes with a happy gasp of relief. He put them under his arm, arose, waved to the crowd and continued his walk in his socks.

He came to a sidewalk café, sat down and ordered a cooling drink. He took out a pencil and pad. Between sips, Caruso did caricatures of people sitting at near-by tables.

For the fun of it, I made a caricature of him sitting at the table in his stocking feet. I stepped forward and showed it to Caruso. He enjoyed it thoroughly, insisting I sit with him at the table. Whereupon, without asking my name or any other question, he made a caricature of me which I still have and treasure. He then had me join him in doing caricatures of the assorted characters seated about. We had hearty laughs comparing our sketches of the same faces. He had no idea whatever that I was first violinist in the orchestra that was to accompany him at the Teatro Nacional. He did not mention opera, except to say he would rather draw than sing. He had another drink, drew a few more caricatures, put them in his pocket and bade me good-by, walking off in his stocking feet with his shoes under his arm.

When he saw me again at the theater he did not recognize me. That is until I showed him my caricature of himself in his socks. He let out a loud roar of laughter. My being a caricaturist amazed him more than my being first violinist. Tullio Serafin had forewarned him about "the boy first violinist."

Caruso sang no more than twice a week. He appeared as Rhadames in *Aida*, as Don José in *Carmen*, as Nemorino in *L'Elisir d'Amore*, as Canio in *I Pagliacci*, as Mario in *Tosca*, and as Lionel in *Marta*, among others. At these performances the Teatro Nacional was packed with standees. Yet, when he

did not appear and lesser lights of the Metropolitan took over, one could always get a seat. A good seat.

Caruso, at times, was visibly affected by the terrific heat, but carried on, nevertheless, with cool heart. Latin-American audiences are lovers of the high notes. If a singer fails to reach the anticipated high note, no matter how well he has sung the other notes, he is soundly criticized and belittled. It was Caruso's misfortune, due to the heat, not to hit the expected high note at a few performances. The audience was demonstratively disappointed, forgetting that even Enrico Caruso was, after all, only a human being. The best cloth has uneven threads.

He lost favor with Cuban audiences by following the Metropolitan Opera House rule of no encores. In Havana, it was customary for an artist to respond generously to the audience's cry of "*Vis! Vis!*" which means more, do it again. Caruso refused to repeat any number. Consequently, much of the early enthusiasm for him disappeared.

As our friendship grew, Caruso gave stimulating encouragement and advice, not only about music, but about caricaturing as well. I have used his advice many, many times in regard to both and will continue to do so.

I visited many times in his dressing room. Always we conversed in Spanish. In all, he spoke seven languages. He lived luxuriously at the Hotel Sevilla while in Havana. It must have cost a small fortune for the rates and room service were very high. He often spoke of his wife, Dorothy, whom he affectionately called Doro, and of his young daughter, Gloria.

I remember his telling me of the daring jewel robbery in his summer home at Easthampton, Long Island. How thieves had broken in during the night and stolen five hundred thousand dollars' worth of Mrs. Caruso's pearls and diamonds. He was noticeably concerned as he described it and still felt there was more to the story than reported. He was more anxious about the safety of his wife and daughter than of the loss of the jewels.

The management had kept the upsetting news of the robbery from Caruso until after his performance in *Aïda*. However, he immediately cabled his wife to relax, that all that mattered was that no harm had been done to her or Gloria.

*Aïda* became a jinx for Enrico Caruso during his stay in Havana. The very next time he sang the opera another extraordinary incident occurred, almost fatal to him and the audience.

It happened toward the end of the first act. Caruso had just left the stage when suddenly in the front of the top balcony near the proscenium arch there was a shattering explosion. Conductor Tullio Serafin, to avoid panic, immediately struck up the national anthem of Cuba. We were as frightened as the audience, not knowing what was to happen next, as chunks of plaster kept falling down on us from the ceiling and smoke clouded the theater. Caruso, still in the costume of Rhadames, returned to the stage, scarcely visible in the smoke. He raised his hands and in Spanish, as we played softly, reassured the people that all was under control and implored them to be calm.

Caruso and music did have charms. The audience left in orderly fashion. With the people safely out, Serafin concluded our playing. As fire broke out on the stage, we clutched our instruments and fled. The pianist, naturally, had only himself to save.

It was soon discovered that the explosion was caused by a bomb. Why it was set off in the Teatro Nacional remains a mystery. Although there were many versions, none was ever satisfactory. Luckily, no one was seriously hurt. The damage did not halt further performances.

By the end of his month's stay, Caruso and I were such good friends that we actually planned a concert tour together. He told my father I was destined to be an outstanding concert violinist, that if I came to the United States, he personally would get my career off to a good start, making all the necessary recommendations and arrangements for a

debut at Carnegie Hall. When Caruso left Cuba I promised him, with fingers crossed, that we would meet soon in New York.

Meanwhile, Francis returned from Paris where he had gained gratifying success as a painter. Shortly after his homecoming, he gave an exhibition in the Grand Salon of the Centro de Dependientes to earn money to go to New York. One of his paintings was a striking portrait of the president of the Centro de Dependientes, who obligingly refunded Francis' fee for use of the Grand Salon. Francis sold most of his paintings at the exhibit. The remainder he disposed of shortly afterward. The sales brought much more than was needed for first-class passage to New York. After he left for the enticing metropolis, I hoped it would not be long before I was able to follow.

However, soon after Francis left, big business decisively took command in Cuba, especially in Havana where the independent merchant, like my father, was unmercifully squeezed out. Gigantic electric companies came in and undersold, and from there on profit for my father in his small electrical supplies store was impossible. He took it philosophically. He was glad people could buy for less than he could sell for. Since it meant bankruptcy to compete with the new large-scale interests in Cuba, my father made up his mind we would all go to New York. It was then he realized that his funds were alarmingly low. Something had to be done about it.

He took me into his confidence. After all, I was now fifteen. We discussed my giving a benefit concert in the Teatro Nacional to raise funds for the transportation of the family to New York and for my study there with the masters. We agreed it was the sensible thing to do. At last my violin was of practical importance to my father.

He personally promoted the concert. Molina helped, too. Due to my father's persistence and many friends, Teatro Nacional was completely sold out. It was as if Caruso, whom



I now would see shortly, had returned to give another performance. I was the only soloist. It was my official debut as a concert violinist. I was not unequal to the occasion. Mrs. Gonzalez de Molina, as talented a musician as her husband, was my accompanist. Arturo Bovi conducted the orchestra which willingly gave its services without pay. Furthermore, the management of the Teatro Nacional made no charge for the use of the theater. It was truly a benefit performance. So much money was raised that even first-class passage to New York for the entire family did not cause too appreciable a dent in our resources. Father closed out his business, sold our house on Havana Street, Francis arranged for our arrival and residence, and we sailed eagerly on the S. S. *Saratoga*, a Ward liner.

It was a calm, uneventful trip to New York except for the occasion of a glorious Fourth of July celebration at sea. We joined in the merry festivities and fireworks and felt we already were American citizens. At night, the captain of the S. S. *Saratoga* gave a formal dinner at which I was asked to play my violin. As I performed, a peculiar feeling that something unfortunate was about to happen made the playing of even simple selections a strain. Later, in my berth, I wondered what was upsetting me. After we docked in New York Harbor, I found out. Enrico Caruso had just left on an extended tour.



*When Salvador Iglesias gave me the miniature violin,  
the birth of the rumba took place.*

5 We arrived in New York Harbor early in July on a blisteringly hot day. It was hotter than Havana ever was. The rail of the S.S. *Saratoga* was smoldering with heat. I could have prepared ham and eggs, with griddle cakes on the side. The Statue of Liberty seemed about to melt majestically away. I could not understand how, without a traffic cop in sight, so many ships, ferryboats and tugs, all moving in every direction, did not crash into each other.

The sky line was an overpowering sight, although I had long ago prepared myself for it. When I wheeled my sister Regina in her baby carriage along the *malecón* in front of Morro Castle I would gaze out over the horizon, completely lost in my thoughts about New York. How big it was, how it looked, how it must feel to be part of such a large city, how much it had to offer those seeking fame and fortune. Yet, as we sailed into the harbor I was overwhelmed by its grandeur and magnificence. Who could imagine that years later I would be starring at its most famous hotel, the Waldorf-Astoria, and be responsible for a new era in America's dancing taste? Certainly not Xavier Cugat.

Francis, on the pier to welcome us, jollied us through the inconveniences foreigners are subjected to upon entering the country. He happily tied the red tape into a beautiful big bow. We were amazed how convincingly Francis spoke English to the inquisitive customs officials. And how readily they passed us through. The only English word the Cugats knew until then was "no," which in any language sounds and means the same.

Francis calmly supervised our luggage, hailed two taxicabs and headed us for Capdevila's, a small Spanish hotel where he had been living on 16th Street between Irving Place and Third Avenue.

As we taxied along, the skyscrapers grew higher and higher. Our cabs were like rabbits darting between the legs of giants. I was wide-eyed watching the scurrying swarms of people, hurrying in and out of buildings, the endless lines of taxicabs all tooting their horns, and the electric light signs flashing on and off in daylight.

Arriving at Capdevila's we felt we were back in Havana. Everyone looked and spoke Spanish—and what a comforting Cuban atmosphere! Even the spicy lunch tasted as if flown from Havana, so typical was the cuisine at Capdevila's.

Francis, progressing nicely with a well-paying job in the art department of the Vitagraph Motion Picture Studios in Brooklyn, had taken time off to get us settled. We stayed at Capdevila's for a few days as there was a slight delay in the delivery of the furniture Francis had bought for the seven-room apartment he had rented for the Cugats at 181st Street and St. Nicholas Avenue in residential Washington Heights.

Our first few days in New York, naturally, were spent in continuous sight-seeing. Francis had carefully planned a tour of all important sights and personally guided us from one wonder to another in the world's greatest city. Carnegie Hall, where I hoped some day to give a concert, was included. Although I was thrilled by the bridges, the museums, the Metropolitan Opera House, Broadway, Fifth Avenue, Central Park, Greenwich Village, Chinatown, the financial district, the Bronx Zoo, the Aquarium, Harlem, Coney Island, Riverside Drive and the Automat, it was stately Carnegie Hall, as you might suppose, that made the deepest impression.

Francis, without delay, had Albert, Henry and me enroll in an English-speaking class in the neighborhood public

night school where he himself, five nights a week, was so thoroughly learning the language.

When the furniture finally was delivered, we left Capdevila's and moved into our spacious Washington Heights apartment. My mother and sister Regina, who disliked hotel life, were completely overjoyed. Their anxiety to move into a place of our own had mounted to the bursting point. We left Capdevila's just in time. They soon gave our apartment the solid, comfortable feeling of home.

Francis lost no time in completing our transfer to the English-speaking class in the new neighborhood public school. These well-attended classes, incidentally, were patiently taught and a tribute to the Board of Education of the city of New York.

Getting used to our new surroundings, the different types of people, the untried customs and foods, was not as slow a process as anticipated. I found the average American, despite his disinterested face, a friendly and responsive person. If thou be a stranger, say the Spaniards, be merry and give the first good morrow. For example, across the street from where we lived was a large and busy newsstand run by a conversable man named Charles Stern. He noticed that my brother Francis bought the *Musical Courier*, *Musical America* and other magazines devoted to music. When Stern asked if he were a musician, Francis explained that it was I, his brother Xavier, just in from Cuba, who was the musician, and added a quick report of my achievements at the Teatro Nacional. When given the chance to speak, Stern told of his teen-age daughter, Evelyn, studying piano and of his young son, Leon, promisingly interested in music. He invited Francis to bring me to his home to meet them. All in the interests of music, of course.

Francis and I were cordially received by the Sterns. The family could not have been more hospitable. It was the dark-eyed daughter, Evelyn, a year younger than I, who impressed me most. She was friendly, intelligent and extremely

pretty. She played remarkably well, having a natural talent for the piano. Her father, thanks to his prosperous newsstand, wisely got the best instructor. The Sterns and I had difficulty in understanding each other, except when music was discussed. Francis did the interpreting. Evelyn's playing intrigued me more than her personal charms. Girls, and the delights they afford, had not, as yet, to any appreciable extent, occupied my thoughts or desires. Imagine!

Our visit with the Sterns was so enjoyable and entertaining that Francis and I returned many times thereafter. It was fantastic how well we understood each other through the universal language of music. My going to night school, of course, soon showed results. I was gradually able to be clearly understood by the Sterns and any other Americans who took time to listen.

On Joaquin Molina's recommendation, I started violin lessons with Henry Schradieck, author of *Exercises for Violin*, a universally used textbook for advanced violinists. In fact, when Tullio Serafin, a few years back, tested me for the Teatro Nacional orchestra, he had me play the most difficult violin exercises Schradieck ever conceived. Consequently, when I came to America, it was natural for Molina to insist that I go to the best teacher and the best teacher could only be the man who wrote the inspired *Exercises for Violin*, Henry Schradieck. A man with a long white beard, he looked like a patriarch. The renowned Maud Powell was one of his best known pupils. Sascha Jacobson was another.

I was longing to appear at Carnegie Hall. My disappointment at not seeing Enrico Caruso had good results. I would not mark time; nor make myself dependent upon anyone's assistance. I would strike out on my own.

Schradieck tried his best to discourage my making too quick a debut at Carnegie Hall. He implored me to wait, believing I was not quite ready for the sagacious ears of New York's music critics. Schradieck reminded me that he who begins badly, ends badly. However, the determination

and firmness of purpose inherited from my father simply would not be quelled. Concertizing at Carnegie Hall was my all-consuming objective. Although certain I was ready, I consented to wait, but only for a little while longer. Talk about your hen on a hot griddle!

Meanwhile, I met Robert Diamant, a cousin of the Sterns who was studying accounting at New York University. For a mathematically minded young man, he had the soul of a musician. I admired him tremendously. Later in my life Bob was to become my mathematically minded and soulful business manager.

By inviting me to house parties, Bob kindled my social life. I always brought my violin. I especially remember our visits to the sumptuous Brooklyn home of Dr. Joel Greenschpoon, who often gave musicales. Evelyn Stern was always included in the invitations and, whenever I played, accompanied me on the piano. We were passionately fond of music, platonically fond of each other.

The New York *Evening Mail's* music critic in those days was Charles D. Izaacson, who, in the interests of classical music, arranged free public concerts in high school auditoriums and parks throughout the city. I played at many of these for Izaacson. For example, in the spacious auditorium of the DeWitt Clinton High School or at the famous Central Park Mall. Without remuneration, of course, for no one was paid for these concerts. However, it was invaluable experience. At the time, incidentally, I spelled my first name with a J—Javier.

Earning no money, I was quickly using up, for lessons mainly, the money saved from my salary at the Teatro Nacional. Francis, fortunately, was earning more and more with Vitagraph; Albert had a well-paying commercial art job. So, without my overdue help as a wage earner, the Cugats were living comfortably. Playing free concerts meant nothing financially, yet it gave me experience before the public and led to priceless contacts in the music world.

For instance, through Izaacson, I met a talented soprano (who must remain nameless), whose wealthy parents were about to give her a concert at Carnegie Hall. She asked if I, for a modest fee, would be her assisting artist. Although it was not as I had planned my first appearance, it was so appealing a temptation I could not resist. I readily accepted and gladly would have overlooked the fee for the chance. At least, I can say that now.

Schradieck was agreeable about it, since I was merely an unassuming, assisting artist and not on trial before the critics. After all, I simply would be filling in while the soprano herself relaxed. She allowed me to pick my own numbers, which I did with melody more than execution in mind. I chose numbers my father would enjoy. She was the one to demonstrate artistry that night, not I.

My selections were especially well received, following, as they did, the soprano's intricate numbers aimed solely at the critics to show range, tone and technique. I learned that night the thrill of pleasing one's public. I never forgot it.

So wholeheartedly were my offerings applauded that I was forced to give encore after encore. With each bow I took, the soprano's rage bristled. Deliriously, she snatched the violin out of my hands and forbade me to go back on the stage. Who was I to argue with a concert artist?

The reviews, quite naturally, were about the soprano. I was mentioned only in passing. The critics stated that I had cunningly picked familiar numbers to please the gullible masses and must not be misled by the acclaim. Well, I knew what the people liked. Too bad critics weren't people!

More than ever was I resolved to give my own concert and please both critic and audience. Without curtailing my technique, I would play what called for mastery, but what sounded good besides.

It was at this time I had, through Izaacson's efforts, my first radio experience. In fact, I was one of the first violinists





*I would play frequently in a well-stocked candy store  
down the street.*



to be heard on the air. I broadcast a recital, accompanied by Evelyn Stern, from the RCA Victor Talking Machine Company's studio in Camden, New Jersey. It was called Station WDY—Major Andrew White was in charge. Several top-ranking executives of RCA Victor were present and made much of my classical efforts. Little did they realize that in the years to follow I would record for them as maestro of rumba band!

first study in Berlin and master the heavy works of Bach and Beethoven.

As I left, Caruso asked to be kept informed of my progress with plans. Unfortunately, I never saw him again. Shortly after the start of the Metropolitan's season, he became ill. Later, while recuperating in Italy, this greatest singer the world has ever heard, died unexpectedly.

Henry Schradieck, convinced there was no stopping me, meticulously arranged a program for my debut in Carnegie Hall. Designed solely to show critics my skill, it was arduous to play and lacked popular appeal. And remember that I was the one determined to please both audience and critics!

Every moment of my time was devoted to practice. I had heard that the secret of success is constancy to purpose. I took special lessons from Leopold Auer, the inspired teacher of Elman, Zimbalist and Heifetz. They were expensive lessons. More than I could pay. My brothers sacrificed willingly. The X in Xavier was there for expense.

To give a concert at Carnegie Hall at that time was a hazardous undertaking. The cost of the auditorium, the advertising and publicity expenses, together with sundry other charges, were exorbitant for an artist of my means. Yet the opulent occasion was a necessary showcase for the critics, managers, agents and sponsors. My brothers and father had to raise an inordinate amount of cash before a date could be set for my official American debut at Carnegie Hall.

Most of the people in the audience on the night of my performance were "guests" who paid no admission. The house, as they say, was "well papered," an accepted custom for the average Carnegie Hall concert. Evelyn, as usual, was my accompanist. Unusually nervous for my first few numbers, I suddenly regained my assurance, played with poise and skill and gave what Schradieck considered a tolerable exhibition of my artistry as a violin virtuoso.

The next morning, upon reading the reviews, I was utterly disillusioned to read that the critics had taken me matter-of-

factly, that I was considered just fair, needed rounding out, offered nothing unusual or sensational, my technique called for no especial excitement and that the laurels of Kreisler, Heifetz and Elman were still secure.

This was a damaging blow to my pride, built up so presumptuously in Havana. Besides, the long hours of daily preparation now seemed such an utter waste of time and effort. Perhaps if I had planned my own program and played only Spanish and Cuban music, the critics would have been intrigued, more kindly disposed and generous in their reviews. Yet you never can tell about critics.

After my failure at Carnegie Hall, I unhappily played unimportant, unprofitable out-of-town concerts. I was discouraged. Instead of earning money, it was costing me money to play. Far too much, at that, in hopes of being a celebrated concert violinist. My brothers, Francis and Albert, continued being loyal and generous; they were determined I would succeed. They felt that perhaps Schradieck was right. I needed more training.

Meanwhile, my father, who would not go to night school, was having trouble in learning the English language from his children. Unable to grasp it, he could not indulge in political discussion, his favorite pleasure in advancing age. Debate was essential to my father's happiness in life. Deprived of it, he was pitifully befuddled in his new surroundings, denying the fact, however, since it must be in the United States that his sons achieve fame and fortune. As they say, the discontented man finds no easy chair.

He was bored with inactivity and too much time on his hands. He was restless and disconsolate. He had been corresponding with our good friend, José Balmaña, who advised that, all things considered, the Cugats should pack up and come back to live in La Bisbal. Had I been a success as a concert violinist, had my debut at Carnegie Hall spun the critics into a devastating dither of delight, my father would have taken pills or better to cure his homesickness for Spain.

However, his homeland was now under democratic rule and no longer gunning for his profile and principles.

Ailing but amiable Henry Schradieck begged me not to lose heart and recommended that I study for a year or two in Berlin. I was still young, he reminded, and should have taken his advice about not attempting a debut at Carnegie Hall unprepared. Until I took advanced study in Berlin and tried again, he warned, my name could never be mentioned in the same breath with Kreisler, Elman and Heifetz, no matter how deep.

Following a family round-table discussion dealing with my future and my father's homesickness, it was decided that after accompanying my father, mother, grandfather, aunt and sister back to La Bisbal, I would go on to Berlin to study at the renowned Conservatory of Music. Francis, Albert and Henry would remain as breadwinners in the United States.

Returning to Spain entailed much more than the abrupt decision to do so. It called for considerable money which the Cugats did not have. Our savings, due chiefly to my deflating Carnegie Hall debut, would not have filled an undersized piggy bank. A dear friend of mine, Lotta Van Buren, a harpsichord virtuoso with whom I had given free concerts, miraculously came up with a get-rich-quick scheme to keep our plans from being shelved. Lotta was a perfect name for her. She had plenty of know-how!

7 Lotta Van Buren was an accomplished musician whose spectacular hobby was collecting outmoded stringed instruments, all of which she played, to put it mildly, amazingly well. Her favorite was the harpsichord, upon which she gave concerts solely for pleasure, since Lotta, financially and socially well fixed, needed fame and fortune like Barbara Hutton needs a five-dollar bill.

When told of how out of balance were my anxiety and funds for further study in Berlin, Lotta promptly proceeded to arrange a benefit concert for me in the large and sumptuous mansion of her friend, Adolph Lewisohn, at which both she and I played spiritedly for her rich and most generous friends.

The Lewisohn music room, acoustically perfect, comfortably seated two hundred people. There was not a vacant chair the night of our concert. Lotta so priced the tickets of admission that when given the proceeds I was staggered to see a total of five thousand dollars. She had charged the willing socialites twenty-five dollars a ticket! Nevertheless, Lotta's skillful playing of her weird assortment of instruments made it a highly entertaining and rewarding evening for all—me especially.

As a result, my father, mother, sister, grandfather, aunt and I sailed shortly afterward for Le Havre, France, there to travel on to Barcelona and thence with great expectations to La Bisbal, where my father planned to operate—you would never guess!—a chicken farm. José Balmaña, the wealthy carriage maker, had convinced him it would be a profitable and interesting business and already had bought for him



*My father used to say, "God save me from a bad neighbor and from a beginner on the fiddle!"*





several prize roosters. Francis, Albert and Henry, progressing nicely, remained contentedly in the United States. They did not have to worry about Bach and Beethoven.

Shortly before my departure for Europe, death quietly took the aged Henry Schradieck. He had taught me much more than music. From him I learned how fatal it is to be overanxious. That if you take your own advice, you must suffer the consequences. Knowing I was on my way to Berlin as he had wished must have helped Henry Schradieck to rest in peace. His death was a distinct and mournful loss to music, a field in which he was long an outstanding scholar and teacher. At his requiem, Sascha Jacobson and I had the honor of playing in tribute and remembrance the "Two Violin Concerto" by Bach. An ironic privilege for me since Henry Schradieck felt I had much to learn about that fellow Bach.

Once we were settled in La Bisbal and my father had put in operation his chicken farm, I left for Barcelona to give a concert. Not that I had changed my mind about study in Berlin, but boyhood fame in Cuba had aroused interest and the request for an appearance. It was a highly auspicious concert, the "local boy makes good" angle having been wisely exploited. As a result of my success in Barcelona, I was booked for concerts in other important cities of the neighboring provinces, averaging as high as two hundred dollars a night. Actually I was concertizing more for morale than for money, which, incidentally, I gave to my father to repay José Balmaña for his outlay of expense for our house and chicken farm in La Bisbal.

My father and family were busy and happy again. Despite the change in Spanish government, my father was again embroiled in political disputes, fully convincing me, once and for all, that in reality he was definitely more intrigued with debate than with politics.

I expected he would regrow the mustache he reluctantly shaved off while in Cuba. I remember how, at the time,

parting with it required all of the courage he could rally. After all, he was openly fond of the distinguished look it gave his face. Unfortunately for him, the mustache was not as well thought of in Cuba as in Spain. Asked why he shaved it off, my father explained that, because of the warmer climate in Cuba, the mustache felt uncomfortable on his face. I knew, however, that his being mistaken several times for a thoroughbred Royalist in democratic Havana was why his kingly pointed mustache was dethroned. Wherever you are, do as you see done. Nevertheless, he never regrew a mustache in La Bisbal.

During my tour in Spain, I became deeply interested in bullfights. In fact, so much so that I used to arrange my concerts so that they would bring me to cities where famous toreadors were appearing.

I became a very close friend of Belmonte, Spain's most famous bullfighter at the time. He was paid seven and eight thousand dollars an afternoon for a fight! Many were the ears Belmonte dedicated to me in his fights. That, of course, is the toreador custom of cutting off the dead bull's ear and giving it to a favored one in the crowd.

I remember a very hilarious incident that happened at one of my concerts after a bullfight. Belmonte was present. As I finished he rushed to the stage and, while I was taking a bow, he came out with an ear and gave it to me. Naturally, he was so well known that his appearance on the stage caused a wild uproar.

My prosperous concerts throughout Spain, however, did not have me thinking that I at last was crowding Kreisler, Elman and Heifetz. I realized that what was being accepted as genius was, in truth, far from it. That I was still in need of the study Henry Schradieck wisely prescribed. I was playing for the masses, God love them, and not for the critics; playing compositions which excited the ear and heart, not the mind and judgment. I did only familiar classics, spiced with Spanish and Cuban music, the latter simply because

audiences, aware of my work at the Teatro Nacional, wanted to hear what Cuban music was like. It was a novelty to them. Nothing more. They much preferred their own music.

There were, incidentally, few great Spanish composers from which to choose selections. Most of the outstanding Spanish music was composed by foreigners. For example, "Caprice Español" was composed by Moritz Moszkowski, a Pole, "Symphonie Espagnole" was composed by Victor Lalo, a Frenchman, and "Spanish Serenade," my favorite, by Bizet, another Frenchman. However, I doff my beret to such Spanish composers as Francisco Asenjo Barbieri, who shows a real love of the popular Spanish spirit in his compositions; to Joaquin Valverde, who composed over two hundred and fifty zarzuelas; to Isaac Albeniz and Enrique Granados, both much more sentimental and less violent than other Spanish composers; to Oscar Espla, who invented a scale of his own; and to Joaquin Turina Manuel de Falla, best known for his "Fire Dance," but whose other works are also full of fire, passion and vigor.

From my flourishing concerts in Spain I amassed a sizable sum of money, gained nothing in technique nor mastery and lost my peace of mind. I was going places in Spain, yes, but musically I was standing still.

I suddenly left for Berlin, bullfights or not, enrolled at the Conservatory of Music and studied violin with the immortal Willy Hess and composition with the equally renowned Karl Flesch. I kept in close touch with my family during my stay in Germany. Occasionally, I would take along fellow students to visit them for memorable week ends in La Bisbal.

My trips there were not taken entirely because of wanting to be with my family. I had met there, shortly after our arrival from the United States, a voluptuous señorita who lived not far from our house. Until then I had never paid much attention to how girls looked, behaved and beguiled, being too concerned with my career. Romance took time and concentration, of which I had none to spare. My father had

gave concerts throughout Germany, France and Italy, with Willie Schaeffer, a pianist I had met in New York, as my accompanist.

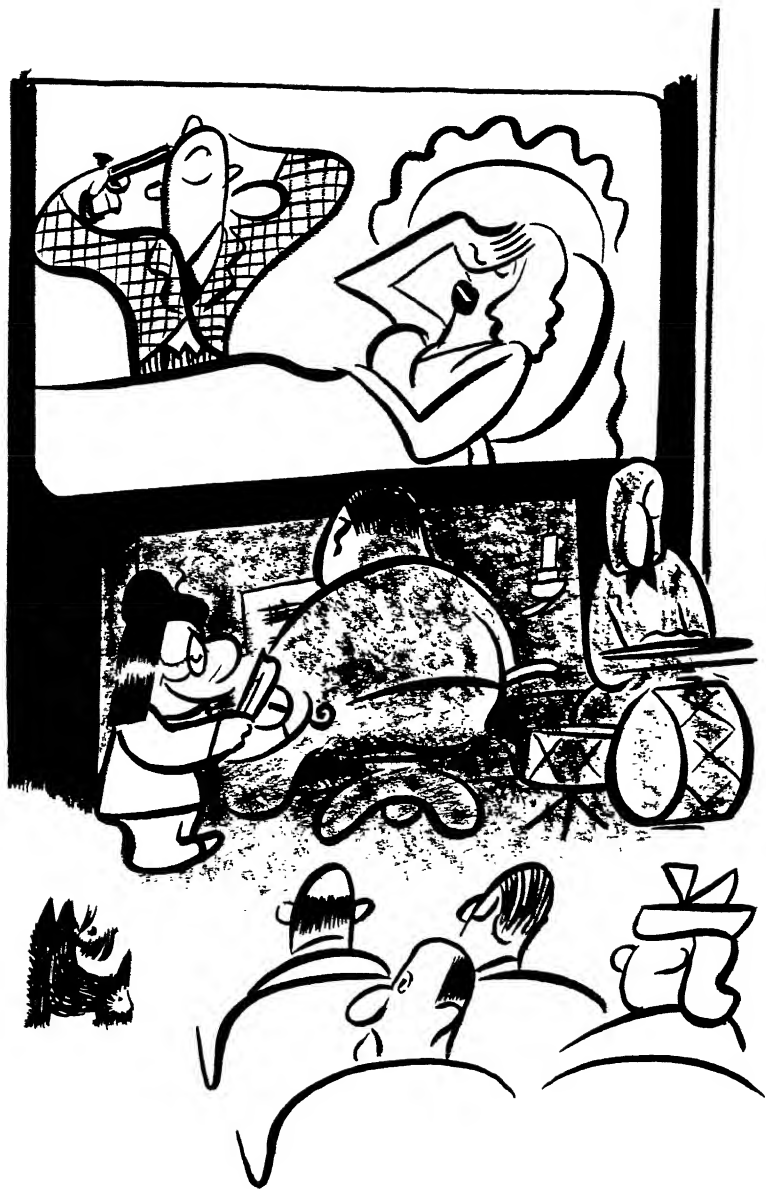
My European concerts were so enthusiastically received that I decided to return again to Carnegie Hall for another try. Bach and Beethoven were now on my side. I hoped I would soon count the American music critics among my friends, too.

8 My brother Albert, en route to visit our parents in La Bisbal, met me in Paris. Commercial art work in New York had been exhausting but profitable, so he was able to afford the luxury of a needed European vacation. However, we spent little time in Gay Paree. Albert, after two and a half years of waiting, was overly anxious to see my father, mother, sister and the others. The sights and delights of Paris were not that tempting. Besides, I shared his enthusiasm and eagerness for the reunion. We were soon on the long, wearisome twenty-four-hour train trip to Spain.

Albert was not too surprised when told that I was returning with him to the United States. He knew how resolved I was to try again. How anxious I was to stick my chin out again for the New York music critics. How hopeful I was to be classed with Heifetz, Kreisler and Elman. What a dreamer I was! But not an idle one, thank goodness.

Our stay with my parents in La Bisbal was one of stimulating conversation, good food, sleep and relaxation. They made much of Albert, asked many questions about Francis and Henry and were reassuring about my return to New York.

My father, up to his ears in local politics, had no desire to return to America: Nor did the other contented Cugats. They preferred the slower, more sensible pace of La Bisbal. After pleasantly spending most of the summer of 1925 with our parents, Albert and I left for New York from France aboard the luxurious S.S. *Paris*. I was then twenty-five years of age. And rarin' to go, as midwestern tourists used to say. I had conquered Bach and Beethoven and was confident my im-



*It wasn't easy keeping pace with the early  
harum-scarum melodramas.*





proved technique and tone would satisfy the severest critics. Though even then, deep down inside, I wanted more than anything to please audiences. Too bad critics are not people.

Francis, Henry and a lovely young lady met us at the 50th Street Pier of the French Line. Who could she be? We soon discovered.

While I was in Europe, Francis had met, fallen in love with and married Ruth Mayo, a young artist who painted as beautifully as she looked. She was the sister of Waldo Mayo, violinist and concertmaster for Major Bowes at the Capitol Theater. They were so happy together, Ruth and Francis, I hoped to be as lucky if I ever married.

My brothers, because of the marriage, had secured another apartment in Washington Heights, more spacious and suitable, in order that the Cugats could continue to live together and yet not interfere with each other's lives. It was quite agreeable to Ruth, because we all adored her.

I soon got in touch with my charitable friend, Lotta Van Buren, whose understanding and wealthy friends had made possible my European study. After an unabridged description of most of my activities abroad, I told Lotta I felt ready for another whirl in Carnegie Hall. She volunteered to arrange the date and make the other necessary arrangements for the concert. Too bad you meet so few helpful friends like Lotta.

Although Enrico Caruso was now dead, his advice and encouragement were still very much alive. I felt that perhaps he was still keeping a watchful eye on a fellow caricaturist.

I practiced, practiced, practiced. Literally wore out Willie Schaeffer, who was to be my accompanist, as he had been in Europe.

I had kept up a casual correspondence with Evelyn Stern, my previous accompanist but, upon returning to the United States, I found she had another and much more vitalizing interest in life than music. Evelyn was happily in love with a visiting New Zealander, here to sell gum arabic. While I had

detected the romance in her letters, I never dreamed how serious it was until my return when I learned that Evelyn was soon to marry and live in New Zealand. Her husband-to-be was in England at the time so I did not meet him. I spent considerable time, however, with Evelyn and her family, as they were the only old friends I had time or inclination to see as I prepared for my third appearance in Carnegie Hall.

After her marriage, incidentally, and the begetting of three children in New Zealand, Evelyn regained her interest in music and before long became the outstanding concert pianist of that country.

At last came the night of great consequence. My concert had been well advertised and given much publicity. It had not been necessary to "paper the house" as thoroughly as before. Seats sold surprisingly well. I was paying all the expenses myself this time, yet, regardless of the heartening number of seats sold, it was still terrifically costly, but worth the privilege.

An appearance in Carnegie Hall had always been a mark of distinction. Times, of course, have changed. But it was the mecca for composers, musicians, singers and music lovers, being one of the few halls in the world with perfect acoustics. I was intent upon living up to its standards and traditions.

I knew that Carnegie Hall was the yardstick with which to measure my future as a concert violinist.

All of the first-string music critics were present. To bring them up to date, prepare them for what to expect, I sent them reports and clippings of my concerts in Europe and Spain, described my years of study in Berlin to master Bach and Beethoven. Nothing like pampering a critic.

I played a well-balanced, provocative program, one calculated to give the critics every opportunity to compare me with Heifetz, Kreisler and Elman, the three top-ranking violinists of the time. I played numbers popularized by each

one of these geniuses, leaving myself wide open for comparison; but remember, I wanted to be in their class or none at all. I wanted to be hailed as extraordinary, too; would not be satisfied with second best. Could not be a second-class concert violinist listened to only when Heifetz, Kreisler and Elman could not be heard.

I played my eager heart out that momentous night. I never worked harder. My fingers, eyes and mind were as much a part of my violin as its strings and bow. Despite its huge size, nevertheless, there is an intimacy about Carnegie Hall which brings out the best an artist has to offer. The atmosphere is congenial and encouraging, ideally suited for violin music.

The reception was, as they say, pronounced. Sincerely enthusiastic. I had to give countless encores before begging off. It sounded like I was in.

Willie Schaeffer was joyfully exhausted. While I felt weak and depleted from the strain, I never let on.

I did not sleep that night. The excitement of it all—the replaying in my imagination of the entire concert, the anxiety of what the critics would say in the morning papers—kept me wide awake with a pounding heart. It was a sleepless but dreamful night.

Up at dawn, I dressed quickly, rushed out on the street to the nearest newsstand and bought every paper in sight. Then back to my room to read the reviews.

And then came the letdown.

Although the critics praised my tone and technique, nevertheless, I had not impressed them as being another Heifetz, Kreisler, Elman—or a threat!

The evening newspaper critics gave the same condemn-with-faint-praise opinion. A less ambitious violin virtuoso may have been thrilled. I could not conceal my heartbreak. Lotta Van Buren did her best to console me. She knew how discouraged I felt. Knew, too, that unlike herself, I could not laugh it off and proceed to make music a hobby as she had done when the critics wrote unfavorably of her.

Had I not been living with my good-natured brothers and adorable sister-in-law I would have gone wacky. It was really torturous to learn the verdict, especially with the bravo'es of the audience still ringing in my ears. Weren't the people ever right?

My friends in the music world, hearing I had threatened to give up my violin, advised me instead to give up the concert field. They introduced me to Vincent Lopez, then in the process of augmenting his popular orchestra for the opening of his New York night club, the Casa Lopez.

He urgently needed a first violinist. Although I had never specialized in popular music, he offered me the job. It made no difference, he insisted, since he wanted to give a classical touch to his huge and slightly symphonic orchestra.

Lopez was persuasive and personable. Besides, he offered me a rather lucrative salary. So I accepted.

Monte Proser, now one of the most successful night club operators in New York, was then press agent for the Casa Lopez. I did many caricatures for Monte to help promote the new night club. The lobby display featured my caricatures of Broadway celebrities.

Conrad Massaguer, famous caricaturist and editor of *El Grafico* in Cuba, who years ago had taught me the art, would have been proud of his pupil.

Playing for Lopez in his beautiful and spacious Casa Lopez on Broadway was a tonic. Invigorating and exciting. Thoroughly unlike my exacting work in the orchestra of the Teatro Nacional, it was like a college graduate going back to grade school. However, Lopez was fastidious about his musical arrangements, many of which, happily for me, bordered on the semiclassical. I did not enjoy playing average popular music. It was too simple, repetitious and stifling. That sounds stuffy, but you know what I mean, amigos.

I was being well rewarded. I had entered into a more adult phase of life, making many new friends. A different type of friend than I had made while concertizing. It was

the Broadway crowd I was now getting to know. It overwhelmed and baffled me.

Playing in a celebrated orchestra in the most lavish night club in New York, I became quite worldly. I got to know several of the glamorous show girls in the spectacular revue. In street clothes they looked quite different than they did as the glorified creatures in the show.

I did not fall in love, but admired them all, dated several, took none seriously; none, in turn, took me seriously, either. Most of the girls were intent on marrying wealthy men. Not musicians. Many succeeded. How happily, I am not sure.

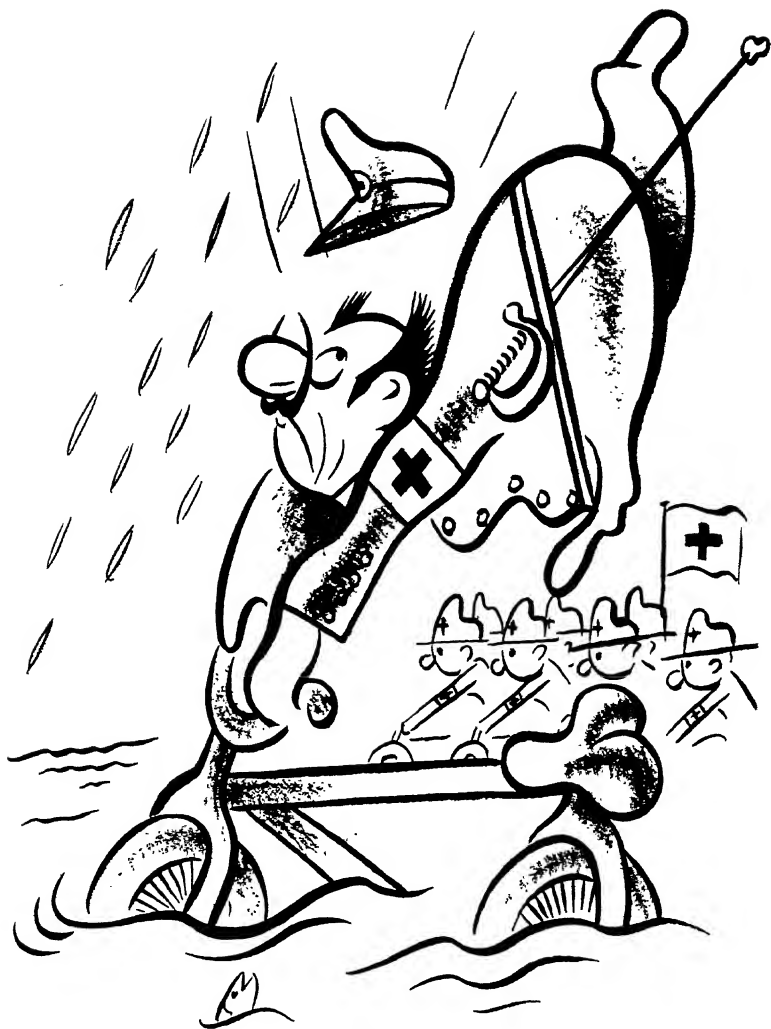
It was, more or less, like being on a gay carefree holiday. Not as if I were actually working. After years of difficult masterpieces, suddenly to be called upon to play Simple Simon compositions was, let's face it, a letdown. Accustomed to playing music the ordinary violinist would not attempt, I was now playing what amateurs could do with one hand. Lopez knew I was dissatisfied, but kept after me to remain with his orchestra. I did not fluff my work. What I had to play I played well. Lopez was pleased with me as a first violinist. It was I who was not.

Vincent Lopez was an interesting character. He believed in and was governed by numerology and astrology. Although we occasionally had our differences, the stars and the numbers were somehow always on my side and warned him not to let me go. I stayed for almost a year. Then quit.

Quit because I had met the distinguished-looking Señor Ignacio Abadal, a wealthy Catalan from Barcelona, who loved American jazz bands and had as his hobby the alto sax.

I first met Abadal at the Casa Lopez. Then later at La Estrella, a small Spanish hotel and restaurant at 82nd Street and Broadway. Famous for its Spanish cuisine, La Estrella was my favorite eating place. Ignacio Abadal liked it so much that he lived right there.

Abadal, an art and antique dealer, was a most convincing



*The first official appearance of my father's bicycle brigade was a disappointment—it rained—and rained—and rained.*



strove to make many friends, for it was essential to survival in this new world. He who does not mix with the crowd knows nothing.

Meanwhile I was not neglecting Señor Ignacio Abadal.

I was doing a better job than he believed possible. At the first exhibit in Los Angeles practically every art object was sold. The remainder went shortly thereafter.

The new-found friends, learning of my concerts in Carnegie Hall, encouraged my return to the concert field. I decided to play at the Los Angeles Philharmonic Auditorium. What is worth doing at all is worth doing well.

Again I was deep in practice, enmeshed in the unending details of a concert. There was no Lotta Van Buren to help me. No Willie Schaeffer for accompanist. However, my new friends promised to co-operate in making it a financial success.

The night of the concert one could have died of loneliness in the auditorium. There were but two hundred people in the audience. Consequently, I played with disheartened restraint, I guess you would call it. You cannot give a brilliant performance under circumstances like that. The scalded dog, remember, dreads hot water. The next day the critics to a man reported on me as dispassionately as had their New York colleagues. Cugat was no Heifetz, Kreisler or Elman, just an above-average virtuoso.

Fortunately, among the Hollywood stars in the small audience that night was Charles Chaplin. What a lucky break! Chaplin's hearing me play was later to be well worth the cost of my ill-advised concert.

After the lukewarm reviews, I shied away from open windows, rivers, razor blades and iodine, put away my violin, determined never again to play. If one, two, three say you are an ass, put on a bridle.

Had I not been a violinist, I would have been, as Ignacio Abadal contended, a diplomat or caricaturist. I read people's faces like fortunetellers read people's palms and that is the



secret of both diplomacy and caricaturing. I can look at a person's face and tell just about everything there is to be told—but never do—about his character, background, past, present and future, if any.

And so my newspaper friends, sympathetic as could be, got me a job as caricaturist on the Los Angeles *Times*.

My first assignment was to caricature the Hollywood Scene, capturing in pen and ink, if I could, the real personalities of movie celebrities.

And then a fateful thing happened.

Charles Chaplin got in touch with me and asked that I see him. He wanted me to do a very special sort of job.

9 Charlie Chaplin, at the time I saw him, was the funniest and foremost comedian of the world. Tremendously successful with his two-reel comedies for Keystone, Essanay, Mutual, First-National and other motion picture companies, he had become an independent producer and constructed his own studios.

He was starting a new comedy with sound and offered me the job of doing spirited violin solos for the sound track of the film. He liked the sprightly type of music I played at my concert in Los Angeles. It was precisely what he needed for his new picture. I promptly accepted his offer.

It was a unique job, soon accomplished, and immediately led to other musical assignments from Chaplin. Besides, I was able to continue as caricaturist for the *Los Angeles Times* because, luckily, I had no set hours.

My whole perspective of life began changing. Maturity was setting in, I guess. The value of money, for instance, suddenly became evident. A golden era of sound in screen entertainment was getting under way. Dubbing in music to accompany the action, as I had been doing for Chaplin, was now the big thing. And Cugat was one of the pioneers.

Just for the record, in 1925, sound had advanced to the point of commercial exploitation by Western Electric Vitaphone. By 1926, Warner Brothers' "Don Juan," starring John Barrymore, became the first sound picture synchronized with a musical score on discs. In 1927, the first pictures with sound on film, such as I did for Chaplin, were being shown. That same year the first film with dialogue, Warner Brothers' "The Jazz Singer," starring Al Jolson, was presented. All of which changed Hollywood—from top to bottom.

I was living with my brother Francis and his wife. He had switched from Vitagraph to become a highly paid art director for Douglas Fairbanks in Hollywood. We lived on Wilton Street. Francis, who thought I had made an unpardonable mistake in giving up my musical career, was overjoyed when, after four months, I resigned as caricaturist for the *Los Angeles Times* to devote all of my time to the increasing number of musical assignments from the studios.

Before I quit, there occurred a particularly happy and important event. I was sent to do a caricature of Dolores Del Rio, then making "Resurrection" at the Fox Studios. To me, she was the most beautiful woman in all of Hollywood. Better still, the most beautiful woman I had ever seen. You can well imagine how excited I was as I approached the set at the appointed time and saw Dolores Del Rio sitting there patiently in all of her breath-taking glory waiting for me to caricature her for the *Los Angeles Times*.

I was uncertain how to address so beautiful a star. As I stepped forward to introduce myself, I burst out with all of the superlatives I could think of which described her beauty. She smiled, bowed, extended her hand and was most gracious. Her manner was in keeping with her striking beauty. She thanked me for my effusive flattery and I trembled along with the caricature. Imagine how stunned and astonished I was when she quietly confided that her name was not Dolores Del Rio but Carmen Castillo. She was Miss Del Rio's stand-in!

Gallantly, I refused to admit I had made a mistake, continuing with my caricature as if she had explained nothing. Neither the trembling nor thrill of excitement left me. In fact, both pleasantly increased. Dolores Del Rio or not, I was in the presence of the most beautiful and charming woman I had ever met.

For weeks I tried desperately to get a date with Carmen. When I asked for her telephone number, she gave two wrong numbers. I asked her the reason. Carmen explained

that she felt in her heart our meeting would culminate in marriage, but at the same time she was very much interested in her career. This caused me much anguish, and not knowing the ways of Hollywood, she had me crazy looking all over for her. So much so that right then I said to myself, "Just for that . . . I will marry this girl!"

Carmen, who lived quietly with her mother, was the aunt and guardian of Margo, a pretty little girl of eight, advanced for her years, who danced, sang and was a cute little mimic, besides. Margo and I were to become great friends.

Being a Mexican, Carmen had many friends among the talented Latin-Americans in Hollywood. Her mother was a good Samaritan to them, especially to the musicians out of work. Finally, one Sunday evening, Carmen invited me to her home to meet some of these *caballeros*. She insisted I bring my violin, for it was to be an evening of music. Among the guests were Emilio Fernandez, now one of the most successful directors of Mexican pictures; General Benitez, later to become Batista's right-hand man in Cuba; and Carlos Molina, who now leads one of the nation's most successful rumba orchestras. All of them worshiped Carmen and her mother and I could understand why.

We had a most delightful evening of Latin-American music and wine. Carmen sang. And sang beautifully. Little Margo danced. I played appropriate solos on my violin. Carmen's friends and I hit it off nicely.

We met frequently at Carmen's home for more of these gay, musical evenings. Several times we played together at fiestas in the amiable Mexican section of Los Angeles. On one of these festive occasions, Carmen proudly suggested our popularity warranted bigger and better engagements. I did not take the suggestion too seriously. As a musical director at the studios, I was doing exceptionally well.

My love for Carmen grew deeper and deeper. She promised, at last, to marry me. Anything to stop me from proposing at every opportunity.

Gradually I became so terribly busy, not only as a musical director but also as a composer and arranger of Latin-American music, that, although we had our marriage license, I could not find time for a wedding. I was working nights as well as days. "Make the night night and the day day and you will live pleasantly" had lost its meaning for me. But completely!

The reason for all the activity was that each producer—and I was working for several at the same time—had just so many days and just so much money in which to make a picture. Naturally, no time was lost. Even minor delays were not tolerated. If you got behind in the schedule, you had to make it up by not taking any time out. My car was one of those models, popular at the time, in which the front seat turned down into a couch. It was a godsend since many of the pictures were filmed outdoors, miles away on location, and instead of driving back to Hollywood for the night I could use my car for sleeping quarters. It became my hotel. That's how hectic Hollywood and I were.

One day, while on location in Palm Springs with me, Carmen begged me to drive her into Los Angeles to pick up a pair of shoes. It seemed ridiculous, but being in love I had my chauffeur drive Carmen and me to the city. Carmen had the car stop in front of a building which seemed much too large and stately for a shoe store. And certainly too impressive. No wonder. It was the City Hall of Los Angeles. Carmen then hurriedly explained that our marriage license expired that very day and, rather than apply for a new one, we should get married at once. I agreed. My chauffeur and a scrubwoman were our witnesses. Unfortunately, we had not time for a honeymoon. I had to get right back on location. Carmen was starting a new picture that very day.

Utterly intrigued by the profit being made by these new sound films, I decided to explore a new field and invest my money in the first Spanish musical film ever made. It was time to go into the motion picture business for myself.



*Serafin was finally persuaded to return to the rostrum.*

Carmen, excuse me, Mrs. Cugat, opposed the idea at first because of its proportions, but finally gave in, knowing I was determined to go ahead anyway. Sick and tired of working for whimsical people, I wanted to be my own boss, make really big money and make life luxurious for Carmen and me.

I hired the best available Latin-American talent and technicians. I pointedly called the picture "Charros, Gauchos y Manolas." It was a full-length musical, written, scored, directed and produced by dauntless me, Orson Welles Cugat! Among its stars were Lupe Velez, Don Alvarado, Maria Alba, and, of course, Carmen Castillo. I spent eighty-five thousand pesos, more than my total savings, in producing the picture. When it was completed and ready for distribution I discovered with a jolt that apparatus to show sound films had not yet been installed in Latin-American countries. I made emergency arrangements for shipment of portable equipment. It was a poor substitute. There was little to be shipped. The venture, in fact, was a horrible failure. A pity, too, because the players in "Charros, Gauchos y Manolas" performed brilliantly. When I go to South America, perhaps I may still find the picture being shown in some small town, having been carried there by a donkey or llama.

A famous director at Warner Brothers consolingly said he had never seen a musical picture done as artistically, never been so aware of the force and beauty of simplicity.

Could a man foresee events, he would never be poor.

# 10

Following my sorry venture as a producer, I readily accepted the musical directorship of a film with a Latin-American background to be made by the then popular box-office star, Gloria Swanson. In addition to directing the orchestra, I was to compose and arrange the musical score, as well. Edmund Goulding, producer and director of the picture, signed me for five hundred dollars a week, a sum to be paid each week until the picture was completed. I was immediately placed on salary and my bank account started breathing again.

I arrived for the first story conference, met Gloria Swanson and others associated with the untitled film, but was told that certain plans were being formulated, there would be no story conference and to come back next week. I came back the next week expectantly and eager to begin work, but the plans were still being formulated.

I was told to wait for further instructions. But each week I would go to get my check at the window of the old Pathe Studios in Culver City. As weeks and weeks went by I felt more and more embarrassed at collecting such a sum of money for doing nothing at all. Eventually, I felt as if I were stealing the money. Each time I would go, I would try to disguise myself with dark glasses or a big hat. After almost a year, I received a note with my check to report to the front office. What they wanted to know was why I was receiving a check for five hundred each week. I told them. I was then informed that they had decided to discontinue the idea of making a Latin-American film, but had forgotten to take my name off the pay roll. Of course, this was B.I.T. "Before Income Tax."

The picture with Gloria Swanson eventually became the ill-fated "Queen Kelly," which cost over five million dollars to produce. I had nothing whatever to do with "Queen



Kelly," the story having been changed completely and the Latin-American background and Cugat removed.

Folly, as they say, is the most incurable of maladies.

Waiting for production to begin on the Gloria Swanson opus made me increasingly restless and dissatisfied with no actual work to do. My wife, Carmen, did her best to keep up my spirits which were headed for a new low. Despite the salary I had received each week, we did not live luxuriously. We were unable to, since both Carmen and I had many, many family obligations and outlandish debts to pay up. I was sending a sizable weekly check to Spain for my father, mother, grandfather, aunt and sister. Carmen was likewise helping to support her own family in Mexico. She came of the largest family I have ever heard about. Carmen had thirty-two brothers and sisters. Her father, an industrious Spaniard, married twice, having sixteen children by his first wife and sixteen children by the second wife, a sixteen-year-old girl he married after his first wife died. He had a son seventeen, one year older than his wife, sixteen—imagine a boy seventeen calling a girl sixteen *Mammy!*

After the death of her fabulous father—he died from an accident, falling from a horse!—Carmen came to Los Angeles with her mother and little Margo, whose ailing mother, of course, was one of Carmen's sisters. Carmen and Margo were both there to further their careers, under proper chaperonage. Margo was placed in the Cansino School of Dancing in Los Angeles, run by Edouardo Cansino, father of the now-famous Rita Hayworth. Rita was then a student at her father's school. She and Margo also attended public school together, and were close friends.

Carmen took vocal lessons from De La Huerta, former president of Mexico, while appearing in small parts in various pictures.

In her efforts to dispel my gloom and get a new job, Carmen persuaded me to form a Latin-American dance band. Up to that time, all Latin-American music on the

West Coast was played strictly by Hungarian trios and presented as fill-in entertainment.

No truly Latin-American dance band was in Los Angeles or Hollywood. One that could play, for instance, the internationally popular tango.

Taking Carmen's advice I re-formed our orchestra. It included Ray Gonzales, who played the maracas, gourds and marimba; Billy Hobbs, who played the accordion; Nilo Menendez, who played the piano; the two Garcia brothers, who played the trumpet and drums; Ramon Ramos, who played the guitar; and myself as violinist. Carmen, of course, was the vocalist. Ray and Billy are still with me after twenty years.

Our first engagement was in the French atmosphere of a small, intimate night club in Hollywood called the Montmartre. We used as our theme song, "Estrellita." From the opening night we caught the fancy and applause of the crowd with our Latin-American rhythms.

One of my friends at the time was Andres de Seguro, a former basso of the Metropolitan whom I had met through Maria Gay during my concertizing days in New York City. He hailed from the same part of Catalonia as I. He had been the close chum of Enrico Caruso and Antonio Scotti. Their gay, off-stage adventures earned them the title of "The Three Musketeers." Andres, well over six feet, wore a monocle even when shaving and looked more the distinguished diplomat than the former opera star.

He knew only the best and wealthiest people in Los Angeles, being an especial pet of California society. The music world loved him. Hollywood adored him. The sports world admired his physique and mannerisms. Former champion Jack Dempsey, for example, was one of his best pals.

He and Jack had formed a partnership, purchased a magnificent hotel—with night club and restaurant—in the picturesque fishing town of Ensenada, Mexico. They asked me to quit my job at the Montmartre, where I was doing

well in an insignificant sort of way, and bring my band to their imposing hotel in Ensenada where I would be starred, well paid and meet, as Andres put it, "only the very best and wealthiest people." Ensenada, one of the exquisite beauty spots of Mexico, is comparable to the French Riviera. I talked the offer over with my boys and we were soon in the employ of Jack Dempsey and my persuasive friend Andres de Seguro.

The trip to Ensenada, living in a luxurious suite, was in reality a belated honeymoon for Carmen and me. But what trouble we had driving down to the hotel! The Mexican roads leading into Ensenada were practically impassable. By that I do not mean they were simply bumpy or in need of smoothing, I mean they were so outrageously inadequate, outmoded and poorly built to begin with that they had no right being called roads at all. In fact, many times I called them several other names! My car and temper were badly in need of repair when we finally arrived.

A gala opening was planned, engraved invitations were sent out to society's finest and personal phone calls were an added touch. Jack Dempsey and Andres were set to make it the biggest opening a night club ever had. Unfortunately, there was no plane transportation at that time and word of the awful roads got around, for hardly anyone showed up. The magnificent place was deserted. Its grandeur went to waste. Jack and Andres took the disappointment graciously, ordered champagne for the band and the waiters. And kept ordering it. Continued to for the next two weeks of our stay in Ensenada.

There was no business. The townspeople could not afford the club, outsiders simply would not ruin their cars on the roads. Instead of sitting around crying their eyes out, Jack and Andres insisted that we join them in using up all the food and liquor. It was a continuous champagne party for two weeks. Never in my life have I spent two such epicurean weeks! Anything we wanted we could have with-

out cost. Jack and Andres knew they had a colossal failure on their hands and were intent upon laughing it off, using up all supplies as they did. It took two weeks of high living. Then the place was shuttered. As Andres said, "The bread eaten, the company departed."

Out of that rare experience came a lasting friendship with Jack Dempsey. Although he lost a fortune in Ensenada, every employee was paid in full. The mark of a real champion.

Carmen, the band and I returned to Hollywood. Due to our popularity at the Montmartre we got a job as relief band at the Cocoanut Grove in Los Angeles. Gus Arnheim and his orchestra, one of the top dance bands in the country, was the main attraction. Singing with Gus at the time were the Rhythm Boys, of which Bing Crosby was a member, and a girls' trio called the Andrews Sisters. I can still hear the melody of the Rhythm Boys' theme song, namely, "Say It With Music."

At the Cocoanut Grove we, of course, used "Estrellita" as our theme song. A good song is none the worse for being sung twice. The place was easily the most famous and raved-about spot for dining and dancing on the West Coast, a mecca for celebrities of the entertainment world. Hollywood stars practically lived there. My Latin-American rhythms caught on immediately, went over so terrifically that the patrons did not treat my orchestra as a relief band. The result was that Arnheim and I had many misunderstandings. When he and his band were ready to return to the bandstand for a set of numbers I could not leave because the couples on the crowded dance floor were applauding and refused to leave. They kept calling out for more Latin-American music. They loved it. Cugat loved it.

During my stay at the Cocoanut Grove, I met practically every star of importance in Hollywood. Three who came more often than the rest were Charlie Chaplin, Douglas Fairbanks and Marion Davies. Chaplin loved to tango to



*In the final scene of Rigoletto, out of the sack jumped a little colored boy who ran screeching off the stage.*



my music. He was one of the few able to do an authentic tango.

I eventually convinced the management it would be a step in the right direction to hire eight Latin-American male dancers to teach the tango. Unfortunately, they were called gigolos. They dressed in white tie and tails and when I would start playing tangos they would arise with their partners, usually beautiful starlets, and dance the tango as it should be danced. Following the dance, I would announce that these Latin-American friends of mine, who danced the tango so well, would be delighted to show the steps to any women wishing to learn; furthermore, their attractive partners would show the steps to the women's escorts. The idea clicked. Everyone wanted to learn the tango the right way.

It was the most popular attraction each night, for the women loved to dance with these handsome Latins and their escorts welcomed the chance to dance with the beauties brought by the "gigolos." They were really not gigolos. One, incidentally, was Guillermo Castillo, one of Carmen's younger brothers.

Brynie Foy, a producer at Warner Brothers, heard us play at the Cocoanut Grove and watched my "gigolos" perform. He decided we were just the thing he was looking for in his experiments with talking pictures. He signed us to make the very first musical short, called "Cugat and His Gigolos." We did the same routine as at the Cocoanut Grove. I was paid only five hundred dollars for Carmen, the band, the dancers and myself. In contrast to the ease with which I collected my five hundred dollars weekly from Edmund Goulding, I had unbelievable difficulty in collecting the five hundred dollars for "Cugat And His Gigolos." This, of course, was B.J.S.—Before "Jazz Singer"—and five hundred dollars for Warners was a big thing.

Meanwhile, my little niece Margo, now fifteen, was dancing at the Casino at Tia Juana, doing an original set of

# 12

Following my first summer at the Starlight Roof of the Waldorf-Astoria, I was engaged for its exquisite Sert Room for the Winter season.

The Sert Room, by the way, was so named because of its murals, painted by the internationally famous artist, José Maria Sert. Like myself, he was from Catalonia where he lived luxuriously in the seacoast town of Palafrugell, not far from La Bisbal. My mother and grandfather, incidentally, were born in Palafrugell.

José Maria Sert married the sister of the celebrated Prince M'Divani, husband at the time of the richest woman in the world, Barbara Hutton. Interestingly enough, it was while Barbara and her husband were visiting the Serts in Palafrugell that the prince, whizzing along at a blurring rate of speed between La Bisbal and Figueras, ran over a stone and lost control of his car. It caromed off the road, crashed into a tree and he was horribly killed.

The poignant murals in the Sert Room depict the "Marriage of Quiteria" from Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Aside from his work in the Waldorf-Astoria, José Maria Sert also did the classic murals in the RCA Building in Radio City.

In the Sert Room, I no longer was considered a relief man, but received equal billing with Leo Reisman. As the floor show, Eve Symington, society lass turned professional blues singer, and the Hartmans, dance satirists, attracted and intrigued Park Avenue society. I played in the Sert Room for supper and luncheon; in the regal Empire Room for the dinner concert. On Sunday afternoons I played for tea dancing in the Empire Room and later offered concert



music for dinner. My days were busy and crowded. I arose at eleven, turned in at three. I did not mind. I was meeting New York society. But Carmen minded. She was jealous of the bewitching and flattering women of the social set.

The patrons of the Sert Room were Manhattan's finest and wealthiest. A different group than that which gathered at the Starlight Roof, the reason being that during the summer New York society leaves town en masse.

Margo was truly a sensation at the Waldorf-Astoria. Her equal as a dancer had never before been seen there. Nor had one appeared with as vivid a personality as Margo's. As her fame increased, Ben Hecht and Charlie MacArthur asked Margo to star in "Crime Without Passion," a movie they were to produce in the Paramount Studios at Astoria, Long Island. She discussed it with Carmen and me. Although we disagreed about various contractual details, nevertheless, Margo signed with Hecht and MacArthur and her screen career was under way. She was growing up fast with a very definite mind of her own. And a will that reminded me of my father's.

The first serious marital trouble Carmen and I encountered occurred when Lucius Boomer informed me that, in keeping with the vogue, I must hire a young and glamorous vocalist to replace my gifted wife. No longer was the voice of a vocalist important, but rather her gay and youthful appearance. Carmen, of course, had a classically trained voice. Operatic arias were no effort for her. She had difficulty, however, in singing popular songs effectively. Boomer, forced into the delicate situation, felt that Mrs. Cugat would understand how business had a nasty way of being imperative. Carmen, however, fumed. Her blood pressure zoomed and her temperament shot off in all directions. She felt cruelly insulted and demanded that we quit the Waldorf-Astoria at once! After many words and tears, Carmen agreed to the change. Why give up all we had struggled for and all we hoped to attain simply because of pride?



*With each bow I took, the soprano's rage bristled.*



There were many likely aspirants for the job of girl vocalist. The girls I liked Carmen did not care for. Those Carmen favored I disliked. When Carmen and I did agree on one, Lucius Boomer found flaws. When he was enthusiastic, Carmen and I disapproved. A few received tryouts, but were found wanting. Finally, a bossy, two-hundred-pound Norwegian mother marched in with her lusciously attractive, yet unworldly, daughter, who sang equally well in English and Spanish. Exactly the talent Boomer desired. She was promptly signed as my vocalist. Her name—Lina Romay. Lina was born in Mexico, her Norwegian mother having married a Mexican of French descent.

Due to the popularity of my nightly coast-to-coast broadcasts from the Waldorf-Astoria, I began recording for RCA Victor. My records sold exceptionally well from the very first day they were placed on sale.

I was soon playing for elaborate society weddings, engagement parties and other well-paying Park Avenue functions. The management of the Waldorf generously allowed me to accept these outside engagements, providing they did not interfere with my schedule at the hotel.

One of my most interesting admirers in the Sert Room was the fabulous Maharaja of Kapurthala, India. He never ate or drank in the Sert Room. He came merely to watch and to listen. He had brought from India a skilled native chef who, in keeping with maharaja customs, prepared all of his meals in his rooms at the Waldorf-Astoria. Upon the maharaja's and the management's request, I brought my orchestra to his sumptuous rooms several times in off hours to play a private "command performance." The maharaja rewarded us generously for our efforts. He once presented me with a solid gold cigarette case, studded with large-sized diamonds.

There was also a Texan millionaire, a stanch friend of Rene Black, who had me bring my orchestra to his rooms. Before each of his requests, the tycoon placed a hundred-

dollar bill torn in half in my hand and told me that when I finished playing the number he would give me the other half. We made three thousand dollars out of him.

We met another wealthy Texan at the Waldorf who got a thrill out of calling his friends all over the world—Paris, London, Berlin, Madrid, Argentina—and having us play a number to them over the phone.

If folly were a pain, there would be groaning in every house.

The social whirl into which I pleasantly became engulfed soon developed into a pronounced annoyance for my wife, seldom included in the festivities. Not that Carmen was deliberately excluded. A dance maestro, especially one who plays romantic Latin-American rhythms, is somehow considered a man without marital ties. I could not very well turn down invitations without slighting the very people responsible for my success at the Waldorf-Astoria. Carmen tried hard to understand, but found it quite impossible. I did not blame her for being incensed. Yet there was nothing I could do about time spent away from her. It had to be done. Better to suffer a known evil than to change for uncertain good.

During my first year at the Waldorf-Astoria, I renewed my friendship with Bob Diamant, cousin of Evelyn Stern's, my former accompanist. Bob had graduated from New York University, become a CPA, and gone into the insurance business. Naturally, I turned over to him all of my insurance and annuities. Margo, Carmen, several of the boys in the orchestra and many influential Waldorf-Astoria acquaintances gave Bob their business. He handled our accounts so expertly that later, when my business affairs became complex, I hired him as my business manager.

He was more than that. Bob was a personal counselor, as well. During my extremely prosperous years at the Waldorf-Astoria, he kept me from the hazardous heights of living in the clouds. No jet-propelled plane to prosperity for me! He

made me travel by showboat. Bob invested all of my earnings in annuities and government bonds, never allowed me to play the stock market, never let me become involved in any business venture which had the semblance of a risk and actually forced me to save money.

Often, I was approached to open my own night club. It was extremely flattering. However, Bob never once felt the backers were quite satisfactory and refused to okay any deal, no matter how tempting to me. He controlled my finances to the extent of never allowing me more than ten dollars at a time in my pocket.

To this day, Bob still handles all of my insurance and continues as my financial adviser. The reasons he no longer is my business manager are that he hates traveling around the country—being away from his family—and, also, in New York there is so much additional financial business for Bob to manage.

In my second year at the Waldorf-Astoria, I was engaged by the National Biscuit Company for its extraordinary, three hour coast-to-coast dance program, "Let's Dance." Actually, for us it was a six-hour program as we repeated it for the West Coast. I shared honors with Benny Goodman and Kel Murray and their orchestras. The program began December 1, 1934, and was broadcast every Saturday night from ten-thirty to one-thirty with the bands rotating. Because of the unusual length and line-up of the program, you can imagine how hectic my Saturdays were, what with fulfilling commitments at the Waldorf-Astoria, yet getting to the N.B.C. Studios in Radio City on time for my rotating appearances. It meant playing a dance session at the hotel, then dashing for the broadcast, then back to the Waldorf, then back again to go on the air and another quick return to the hotel. My ingenious brother, Albert, solved the difficulty by corralling, each Saturday night, a fleet of taxicabs, waiting in gear, to whisk us back and forth. Thanks to Albert, I was never late for a broadcast nor for a set of dances.

"Let's Dance" was short-waved to the entire dancing world. It went off the air May 25, 1935, being too costly and impractical a program to continue.

Carmen, wanting her own home and the privacy that goes with the privilege, became more anxious to move out of the Waldorf-Astoria. After two years of hotel life, she found a ground floor apartment on Beekman Place with a spacious back yard that ran right to the East River's edge. It made us both very happy, especially Carmen. Now she could cook again. She was fantastic at cooking Mexican food. Rene Black, Lucius Boomer and Oscar of the Waldorf, himself, were among her frequent and enthusiastic table guests. I was so proud of her.

Carmen's mother lived with us. Unfortunately, it was not for long because she, who had courageously borne and raised sixteen children, was suddenly called to a well-merited reward. Her death taught Carmen the real meaning of loss and sorrow. Margo, too, was deeply upset, for in her grandmother she had lost her dearest friend.

As the Spaniards say, she is good and honored who is dead and buried.

Following Margo's appearance in "Crime Without Passion," she went on to Hollywood to appear in "Rumba," with George Raft and the late Carole Lombard. She decided to remain there for a movie career.

After Margo's departure for Hollywood, I had to hire a new dancer. Music Corporation of America brought over the most Irish-looking girl I ever saw, one more suited for Irish jigs and reels than Latin-American routines. Her name, nevertheless, was Marissa Flores. Lucius Boomer, impelled by sentiment rather than respect for Marissa's ability, signed her to replace Margo. Marissa, you see, had brought along her sister and her sister's five-months-old baby, Margarita, both of whom she had supported since the death of the child's father. It was too touching for Boomer.

Marissa learned fast, worked hard and soon her talent

rivaled her beauty. So much so, in fact, that shortly after the start of her second season with me, Marissa, too, was signed for pictures in Hollywood. As expected, she took her sister and baby Margarita with her. Carmen hated to see them go. She had gotten to love the baby. Many, many times she minded little Margarita in our suite.

Marissa's career, unlike Margo's, got off to a poor start in Hollywood. She appeared in a B picture which meant nothing and, as a result, Marissa got nowhere. She, her sister and the baby remained in Hollywood hoping for another try. A good thing they did. Although Marissa's good fortune tapered off, the baby, grown into girlhood, showed unmistakable signs of being a prodigy and MGM signed little Margarita O'Brien to a contract.

When one door shuts, another opens.

Dinah Shore, Buddy Clark and Miguelito Valdes also sung as vocalists for me during my lengthy stay at the Waldorf-Astoria. Lucius Boomer was not too pleased when I hired Valdes, since this talented Cuban's unkempt appearance did not fit in too well with the swanky atmosphere of the Waldorf-Astoria. I forced Miguelito into dressing meticulously. Furthermore, I insisted that he sing no numbers that would shower ringsiders with his excessive gyrations and explosions. For a while he was docile and immaculate. I could see, however, that I was stifling the artistry of Valdes. I relented a bit and allowed him more freedom with his dress, hair-combing and delivery of songs. But in giving Valdes an inch he took a mile, with the result that he soon irritated the customers and Boomer so much that I had to let him go. It was advantageous for Miguelito because, on his own, just as with Dinah Shore and Buddy Clark, he progressed faster, farther, and more prosperously.

During my third year at the Waldorf-Astoria I played my first New York theater engagement at the Paramount on Broadway. Lucius Boomer believed it good publicity for all concerned to have me tour the nation billed as Xavier





*Belmonte, the famous bullfighter, came out with an ear and gave it to me.*



# 13

I have had the same personal secretary for over ten years. Her name is Lillian D'Morello. She is the tallest, blondest, most attractive grandmother I ever saw. Grandmother is right. Her daughter, Helen, is the mother of four children.

Lillian is Irish, speaks Spanish and French fluently, has traveled extensively and is at home in any country. She knew all about Barcelona, for instance, having lived there herself for quite some time.

A mutual friend, Consuelo Ortega, was the first to call my attention to Lillian. She was working as a buyer in Gimbel's Department Store in New York City, a job gotten through friendship with Alex Gimbel, but held strictly because of ability.

I knew as soon as I saw Lillian that she simply had to work for me. In my position at the Waldorf-Astoria, she was precisely the diligent and dignified type I needed. My wife, Carmen, with me at the time, agreed, too, that Lillian, the personification of tact and efficiency, must be hired.

I asked her to be my personal secretary at a much larger salary than she was earning. Then came a shock! She admitted she could not type or write shorthand, had never done anything that had even resembled secretarial work. That did not matter. There was much more important work in connection with the job than typing and taking dictation. I finally persuaded Lillian to accept the position.

She took over immediately, as though she had been working for me for years. Frankly, I do not know what I would have done without her. Not that it was terribly essential to her duties, but she learned to type as fast with two fingers as any typist using ten. Although she knew no shorthand

method, Lillian had her own set of symbols which worked swiftly and satisfactorily. I could talk to her in Spanish and she, of course, could write it down in English.

She got along beautifully with my business manager, Bob Diamant; the boys in the band loved her; the management at the Waldorf-Astoria treated her as one of its own. The same was true wherever we traveled, whomever we met. Lillian got attention. More important, she got things done. Luckily for me, Carmen was not jealous of Lillian. They became the best of friends. And still are.

My family accepted Lillian as one of its members. Everyone loved her. Everyone respected her.

A handsome woman, believe me, is always right.

Despite her dignity, Lillian once threatened to punch me in the nose! She had driven all the way from Texas, day and night, with my big dog Lobo to meet me in Philadelphia, where I was to start a theater engagement. I had come from New York by train, less than a two-hour trip. Disgruntled over some inconsequential thing as I got off the train in the City of Brotherly Love, instead of expressing thanks for her mad dash across the country, I let loose with my silly gripe as if she were to blame. She took it for a minute or so, then suddenly, Lillian squared off, looked me threateningly in the eye and declared, "Cugat, stop before I punch you right in the nose!" Believe me, I stopped fast, came to my senses, apologized and got to the business of my theater engagement.

He who tells me of my faults is my teacher; he who tells me of my virtues does me harm.

One afternoon while rehearsing my band, Cole Porter, a guest at the hotel, came up to the bandstand, introduced himself and explained that he was working on a new number and having considerable trouble with it. Since it had a Latin-American flavor he asked if I could help him with the melody. He sat down at the piano and played the song. I had my boys join in as he replayed it. A Latin-American

jam session. Well, with our various improvisations, he finally whipped his song into satisfactory shape. The name of it? "Begin the Beguine." I had the privilege of introducing this Cole Porter classic to the American public.

Another famous song I introduced was quite by accident. A music publisher asked me to record a Noel Coward tune for Victor that had been a big hit in London. I agreed and was to couple it with another of the publisher's songs, a number he had little faith in. But he felt any number at all, no matter how bad, could be coupled with the Noel Coward number and get by. This song, thrown in by the publisher, caught on so solidly it sold three million records! The Noel Coward number was the one carried along. For the life of me I cannot remember the name of the Coward number. But the other song was "Isle of Capri."

I became very friendly with the immortal George Gershwin, who often visited the Sert Room. Deep in thought, he would listen to my band as if he were making mental notes. Which indeed he was. For later, he flattered me by saying my music inspired him to do his famous "Cuban Concerto."

Several times he invited the boys in the band and me to his Riverside Drive apartment. There, as we had done before with Cole Porter, we would have a jam session, with George sitting in at the piano, alternating with my own pianist, Nilo Menendez, a talented composer who did, among other hits, "Green Eyes." It was Gershwin, I remember, who first suggested to Lucius Boomer, in a well-worded letter, that after three years of steady employment at the Waldorf-Astoria I was entitled to a vacation.

The fertile field becomes sterile without rest.

The reason I had taken no vacation was, truthfully, that I feared Latin-American music might prove to be just a novelty and soon wear off with the American public. I wanted to take no chances. George Gershwin, however, convinced me and Lucius Boomer that such was not so, that Latin-American music was definitely here to stay. Inci-

dentially, Mr. Boomer already had received countless testimonials about me. You see, following in my diplomatic father's footsteps, I would always say, when people complimented me on my music, "Don't tell me, tell Boomer."

I decided to spend a three months' vacation in Europe with Carmen, Lobo and my Pierce-Arrow. Carmen did not mind my bringing the Pierce-Arrow, but thought taking Lobo along was inviting trouble, annoyance and inconvenience. But ever since I was a boy in Cuba I have had a dog. I have owned every kind of a dog imaginable. In fact, some of the dogs I have owned are beyond imagination. Someday I hope to start a dog farm in Mexico where dogs may be cared for as your A.S.P.C.A. treats them in this country.

He who has not bread to spare should not keep a dog.

I had been told that the best travel bureau in the world was the Patronato Nacional del Turismo. I found this to be absolutely true during our vacation in Spain. All of the good roads and hotels, together with steamship, plane and railroad improvements, were the result of this government agency whose primary purpose was to encourage tourist trade to and in Spain. There had been many vital changes and advancements since my last visit. Spain, as my father had advocated, flourished as a democracy.

Alfonso XIII had ruled a kingdom composed of diverse groups, miraculously held together. He ruled a complex country whose customs and standards could not be generalized. Yet, during our visit it was obvious that unrest and uncertainty again were mounting.

On September 13, 1923, Miguel Primo de Rivera initiated a military uprising in Barcelona against him and triumphed without firing a shot. King Alfonso, who must have known what was going on, readily accepted the dictatorship. Alfonso was thought by many to be the most democratic king who ever lived and his happiest day was when he gave up his throne.

Carmen and I stayed at the Ritz in Barcelona. We liked

it better than the Ritz in Madrid or the Alfonso XIII in Seville. The Colon was one of our favorite eating places.

Carmen adored Barcelona. She was pleasantly surprised to find so many lovely gardens throughout the city. She had been misled to expect that Barcelona was an unhappy combination of Pittsburgh and Chicago.

Naturally, we visited my parents in La Bisbal. I had written them many sweet and sincere exaggerations about Carmen and hoped they would feel that she lived up to all of them. On the other hand, I had raved so many times to Carmen about my family that I prayed she, too, would not be disappointed and disillusioned. They treated her as if she were the daughter and I were the son-in-law, all because Carmen herself could not have been more tender, considerate and lovable.

It was a compensating visit, for it helped immeasurably in bringing Carmen and me close together again as we had not been since leaving California for New York.

In connection with my three months' vacation in Europe, I will always remember the atrocious treatment given to dogs, especially in Spain. In Barcelona, for example, there was no veterinarian who really knew anything about dogs. I found the same to be true in Madrid, regardless of the fact that dog races were popular there. I became so touched over the niggardly treatment of dogs that I made a daily practice of buying a box of scrap meat, putting it in our open Pierce-Arrow and driving through the streets to throw the meat to the unfed dogs of the city. It got so that the dogs would gather outside of our hotel waiting for us to come out and feed them. I do not know how many dogs would follow us, but it looked and sounded like thousands.

The Spaniards thought we were crazy Americans, spending as much as ten dollars a day for meat to throw to the dogs. Yet I have never since had the same happy, important feeling as when Carmen and I would toss meat to the hungry dogs of Madrid and Barcelona.

On the other hand, the day we left Barcelona was one of my unhappiest. I wanted to talk to the dogs and tell them I was leaving, that I would not be with them the next day. How many times I have thought of how many days those dogs waited for us before giving up hope! How long, I wondered, does a dog's hope last?

My wife, one morning before we left, while in a butcher shop buying meat for the dogs, overheard a woman confide that a particular dog she hated would never bother her again. She had stuck a fishhook into a piece of bread and fed it to the dog. Suddenly, like an explosion, Carmen tore into her tooth and nail with all of the fury of her heritage. The police came, stopped the fight, sent the scratched and bleeding woman to a hospital and hustled Carmen back to the hotel. To this day, I am sure that that woman who murdered the dog must carry a scar or two like the one on Dolores Del Rio's shoulder, inflicted during her realistic fight with Carmen in a factory scene in "The Loves of Carmen."

Life is strangely ironic. While I was feeding the poor hungry dogs of Spain, my own dog, Lobo, became violently ill with intestinal trouble—Carmen always insisted he was poisoned—and died. Heartbroken, we grieved as if an only son had died. Carmen and I held our own little funeral for Lobo, buried him beside an olive tree on a hilltop just outside of Barcelona, overlooking the Mediterranean.

I remember, as a young man, meeting Alfonso XIII when he was king of Spain. Some influential friends of mine arranged for me to meet His Majesty at a very exclusive party in the Club Nautico in Bilbao.

I was in Madrid at the time and Bilbao is some fifty miles away. But the best road in all of Spain is from Madrid to Bilbao.

To make the right impression on the king I bought an expensive cutaway. I was as proud as a peacock as I started out on the trip from Madrid to Bilbao in my car and costly





*I was not a good-looking boy but this girl in La Bisbal—  
she liked me for myself.*

cutaway. I knew the king was a connoisseur of cars. He had several Hispano Suizas, Fiats and an Isotta-Fraschini or two, but I was sure my big Pierce-Arrow would catch his eye as I drove up.

It was a warm and dusty day. I was making very good time when suddenly I came to a section of the road where it was difficult to pass the car ahead of me. It was a broken-down old jalopy—an old Ford, I think—and in it were five tough-looking characters who had had just enough to drink not to let me pass. Every time I swung out to get by they would swing over and block my path. I was losing precious time. I would be late for my introduction to King Alfonso. I was losing my patience. I was losing the crease in my pants. I was losing my composure, but completely! Blowing my horn meant nothing to these characters. They would blow their horn right back at me and hog the road.

I did not want to have any trouble with them because they were too hard-boiled looking; besides, there were five of them and I was already late for my appointment. I had almost decided to play it safe and stay in back and sweat it out when, with a sudden burst of courage, I decided to sweep the car off the road and tell the driver exactly what I thought of him as I passed—in good Spanish!

It did the trick.

Those thugs did not try to catch up with me, but let me speed ahead on my belated way in my Pierce-Arrow to see the king.

However, the experience on the road had upset me mentally and physically. When I got to the swanky Club Nautico my cutaway was messy, my collar wilted, my face dirty, my disposition awful. I looked as washed out as I felt. The king, too, was delayed. But not sufficiently to give me time to freshen up. I felt like an outcast. I hoped the king would not detect my ruffled attire.

At last the big moment came to meet the royal ruler of Spain, an event I had long awaited over the years, an event

which was, up to then, the greatest in my life. I was trembling like a little schoolboy. I was overcome with the importance and the excitement of the occasion; yet heartbroken to think I was not at my best. I hoped the king would overlook it.

Imagine my humiliation and chagrin when, upon my presentation to King Alfonso, he took one look at me and burst into laughter!

I backed away, wounded to the heart. The king followed me. His laughter got louder. Taking me by the arm, he hurried me into an anteroom where we could be alone.

"Cugat!" he exclaimed, putting his arm around me. "Cugat, it was I, incognito as usual, in the broken-down car you called a son of a bitch."

Carmen and I, during our European vacation, also had a whirl in Paris. The high point of our short stay in the city of wines and gaiety was lavishly arranged by Ernesto Soler, an artist from Catalonia I had long known and admired, who, like his good friend, Pablo Picasso, was a celebrated impressionistic painter. Picasso, incidentally, comes proudly of Basque ancestry, too.

Soler and Picasso, determined to entertain us as we had never been wined and dined before, decided to give a brandy dinner for Carmen and me with Picasso, himself, as the chef. They invited ten fellow artists from the Academy of Arts in Paris to make a festive group of fourteen for the fabulous fete. It was given in Picasso's treasure-laden studio apartment in Paris. Carmen, of course, was the only woman present, but was so personable and beautiful as to have been fourteen Du Barrys. It was the most remarkable dinner I have ever eaten. Picasso generously flavored every course with brandy. He wore a chef's hat, tilted just so. Soler wore a waiter's white apron tied high at armpit level.

Before dinner we had brandy cocktails, a delicious and original concoction to which Picasso wisely limited his

guests to three and himself to one. Next came a fruit cup flavored with brandy. A bouillon followed and it, too, had brandy in it. Picasso then served his *pièce de résistance*, roast beef and vegetables cooked in brandy. The salad had a brandy dressing. For dessert, the ice cream and *petits fours* were spiced with brandy. And then to climax the singular feast came brandy royals. Brandy, of course, was not only Picasso's favorite drink, but inspiration as well. He was unsparing with his choicest bottles in his seasoning of this preposterous dinner.

As you well may imagine, we were an extremely loquacious and animated group as the dinner finally ended.

In fact, dawn was breaking as Carmen and I, exuberant with gratitude, left for our hotel. The bountiful Picasso, touched by our appreciation, gave each of us a treasured bottle of one-hundred-year-old Napoleon brandy.

To the grateful man, give more than he asks.

Back from our vacation, Lucius Boomer gave me a Norwegian elkhound, Moro, to take the place of dear Lobo. In time, I became strongly attached to Moro, although I never thought there would be another dog to win my heart as did Lobo.

Moro was the most intuitive dog I ever owned. I remember an amazing incident during an engagement in the Stanley Theater in Pittsburgh. I kept Moro with my wife and me in our hotel room. He kept us awake one gloomy, rainy night with a restlessness not at all characteristic of him. He kept attracting my attention and would not let me sleep. My wife and I thought at first Moro was sick, but soon discounted this because of his alertness. Although unable to decide what was disturbing him, we were convinced it was nothing organically wrong. We did our best to reassure and quiet him, feeling, perhaps, he was frightened about the storm. Moro refused to relax or leave the side of our bed.

Intuitive Moro!

By morning the most disastrous flood in its history struck Pittsburgh.

My first thought was of my eighty-thousand-dollar Stradivarius violin which I had left in my ground floor dressing room. I got to the Stanley Theater in a rowboat. The building, of course, was flooded, the property damage enormous. I waded into the dressing room. The violin was not there. In fact, very little was left in the dressing room. It had all floated away.

Disconsolate over losing the only musical treasure of great price I ever owned, I started back to my rowboat. The manager of the theater, trousers rolled up, thereupon appeared in another rowboat. To my great relief and happiness, he explained that, on seeing the waters rising, he had realized my Stradivarius was in danger and rushed to save it from ruin.

Yes, good old Moro was the most intuitive dog I ever owned.

# 14

Returning from our second honeymoon, I reopened the fashionable Sert Room with the same thrill and expectancy of my very first opening night on the Starlight Roof. The applause was every bit as heart-warming. Several months later I started on a coast-to-coast tour, playing record-breaking theater, hotel and concert engagements in the principal cities between New York and San Francisco. The billing was always Xavier Cugat and his Waldorf-Astoria orchestra. The hotel got just as much benefit out of the tour as I.

At the Statler in Detroit I was informally honored by one of my most highly respected radio admirers—the late Henry Ford. He would come regularly by himself to listen to me play. But in order to be unnoticed he would enter quietly through the service entrance and sit at a rear table, behind a partition, comfortably out of view. Oddly enough, we never spoke to each other. I had merely a nodding acquaintance with Henry Ford. I respected his aloofness. He would wave his hand and smile approvingly after each number. On leaving, he would extend the same courtesy. And Cugat's chest would practically burst.

The extensive tour continued on to the West Coast where, following a gratifying home-coming engagement in the Cocoanut Grove of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, I played in the Peacock Court of the Mark Hopkins Hotel in San Francisco. This was in 1936.

One night while playing in the Peacock Court I learned there had been uprisings in Morocco, inspired by General Francisco Franco, and that the spirit of rebellion was spreading in Spain. I was at once concerned over the safety of my family living in La Bisbal, dangerously close to pivotal

Barcelona. That night was my first experience with the torturous theatrical tradition that the show must go on. While I went through the motions of leading my orchestra, my thoughts were all of what was to happen next in Spain.

My father had retired from his judgeship in the County Court of La Bisbal, yet I wondered how many enemies he had made during his years on the bench. I knew, as I played on, how outspoken and obstinate he could be and was fearful of the consequences. The rights of democracy for which he had fought and seen established were now imperiled. The victory was in jeopardy.

My night's work on the bandstand finally ended. I left hurriedly, wanting to be alone to concentrate on immediate plans for my family's safety.

To my father, the Republican form of government, under which he served as judge, had functioned solely for the good of the people. When the Socialists took over, I could tell by the tone of his letters that various unscrupulous politicians and civic officers had taken outright advantage of the citizens' loyalty and trust.

It was because of this coup that Franco hurled his challenge, unfortunately, not against specific offenders, but at the entire party in power. He denounced them all as Reds and Communists, whether they were or not. I was sure my father, to whom Spain came first and party allegiance second, would be neutral in the uprising. Yet he would see the abuses and evils on both sides and condemn them openly in the market place. That is what I was afraid of.

Tell not all you know, I remembered, nor judge of all you see if you would live in peace.

He would see that the ideal form of Republican government was tottering. That those in power, rather than institute reforms, had selfishly taken advantage of conditions. That Franco was combatting the government with ruthlessness instead of wisdom. My father would not be quiet with Spain in danger.



*The stars and the numbers warned Lopez not to  
let me go.*





It was a crisis from which I vowed to free my family, no matter what the cost. After all, there is no lock when the pick is of gold.

The next day, by transatlantic telephone, I learned that lawlessness was already rampant in La Bisbal. Old scores were savagely being settled under the guise of patriotism. My sister, for example, standing on the balcony of my father's home, saw two men mercilessly empty their guns into a pleading, unarmed old man. At the bloody sight of it, she collapsed and went into a critical nervous breakdown.

I immediately made all personal affairs secondary—as did my brothers—to work out a plan to get my family safely out of Spain. The details must remain confidential, although they involved no treasonable action. For weeks we were distraught with anxiety and frustration.

Unbelievably, my father had not as yet been molested—positive proof that while sitting on the bench he had been just in all decisions handed down. He was respected by both sides in La Bisbal, the authorities in charge and the Insurgents intent on establishing a new government. Yet that respect and protection was sure to be forgotten as the war raged more intensely.

At last we were able to get the Cugats out of La Bisbal and they fled through the Pyrenees into France with other Spanish refugees. While the family was anxious to live with relatives in Rheims, because of my ailing sister they went instead to Amelie-les-Bains, a health resort and suburb of Perpignan, where one can enjoy the healthful benefits of mountains and sea at the same time. Under these conditions Regina regained her health.

My brothers and I, alarmed anew over what was to happen in Europe, insisted that they leave for Cuba, where my brother Henry, an executive at the Hotel Plaza in Havana, would arrange for their arrival and needs. My father agreed, passage was booked, and the family set sail for Cuba.

The way to be safe is never to feel secure.

Room at the Waldorf-Astoria would be quite an attraction—and profitable besides. \*

All of my time off the bandstand was devoted to the caricatures. Normally I work fast when drawing, but the importance and significance of this assignment, plus my desire to surpass anything I had yet drawn, naturally slowed me down. By the end of October, however, my caricatures were completed and the Lounge Restaurant ready. A preview party was held for the press and influential guests on the afternoon of October 30th. In the evening the restaurant was formally opened. Rene Black and Ted Saucier were one hundred per cent correct. The room became the talk of the town.

The Lounge Restaurant, located directly off the famous Peacock Alley, served luncheon, cocktails, dinner and supper. A small dance band, called "The Abbotts," provided the dance music. Raphael and his concertina entertained during supper. There was cocktail dancing on Saturday afternoons. It was too small a room, of course, to accommodate my own orchestra.

The provocative color scheme, for what I like to call the Cugat Room, combined southern coral with electric green; the walls and ceiling being coral, the leaf-pattern rug and chair upholstery being green. My caricatures were done in white and dark shades of coral. The "Who's Who at the Waldorf" murals consisted of no less than seventy-five personalities unmistakably associated with the history of the far-famed hotel. Included were illustrious orchestra leaders, singers, dancers, entertainers, celebrities, executives of the Waldorf-Astoria and a doorman who has been at the hotel for forty years since the old Waldorf days.

I began with Mrs. Lucius Boomer, wife of the president of the Waldorf-Astoria, with their two children, Bonita and George, Rene Black, Oscar of the Waldorf, Head Waiters Ambrose, Robert and Frank, Head Chef Gabriel Lugot, Leo Reisman, who alternated with me in the Sert Room, Guy

Lombardo, Wayne King, Rudy Vallee, Shep Fields, Basil Fomeen, Mischa Boor, Meyer Davis, Lowell Thomas, Major Bowes, Elsa Maxwell, Edgar Bergen, Charlie McCarthy, Noel Coward, Cole Porter, Eve Symington, Sonja Henie, Donald Duck, Helen Wills, Veloz and Yolanda, the Hartmans, the Orson D. Munns and Margo. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Duke of Windsor, former President Herbert Hoover, and my wife, Carmen, were among other notables.

I did all of the caricatures with a minimum of line and a maximum of burlesque.

Incidentally, I have done caricatures of almost any celebrity you can think of, on almost everything imaginable—envelopes, menus, theater ticket stubs, match folders, laundry tickets, etc. My file contains over thirty-five thousand caricatures of persons, famous and otherwise, I have drawn in one manner or another.

Speaking of caricatures, I have a very pronounced Moorish nose, like my father's. Large and prominent. So have my brothers. So did my father's father. Pictures in the album show that our whole family have Moorish noses. Because of this outstanding characteristic, plus my accent, I had a miserable experience with a famous columnist.

There had been a rumor that actually I was Jewish, but was denying it. This columnist loathes racial deception. Had I been Jewish, of course, I would not have denied it. But I was born and baptized a Roman Catholic, was using my given name and felt the columnist should accept the facts. But no matter how I tried to tell him, my nose and accent stood in the way. He would not believe me. The more I tried to explain the more he disliked me and the boys in my band, as well. He suggested in his syndicated column that my Latin-American music and musicians be boycotted because they were keeping American musicians out of work. Hard to believe, isn't it?

Unraveling miles of red tape, I got my birth certificate

from the archives of the Cathedral of Gerona. I rushed it to my friend, Joseph Connolly, then head of King Features, begged him to show it to this columnist and clear up the misunderstanding. He promptly did. Once the columnist saw the indisputable document he was convinced I had not been lying about my ancestry, although my nose and accent certainly had him believing otherwise.

The columnist and I are now the best of friends. In fact, there is not a smother rumba dancer in the United States.

My name has always been a problem to my friends. They call me many things but most of them call me either just Cugat or Coogie. Very few call me Xavier. I suppose this is because I like the emphasis on the X. My brother Albert calls me Mr. X. Carmen always called me Cugat. Fred Astaire, while we were making "You Were Never Lovelier," my first full-length picture in the new Hollywood, was the first to call me Coogie.

Costarring with Fred, incidentally, in "You Were Never Lovelier," was Rita Hayworth. I had not seen her since years back, when, as musical director of "The Great Divide," I engaged Eduardo Cansino's (her father) dancing troupe for the picture and Rita was a member. At that time she was overweight, awkward, had dark hair and made no glamorous impression whatever on me. But my, how that girl danced! She had gained great poise and experience as her father's dancing partner at Agua Caliente. Rita's mother, by the way, was Irish, explaining why at times Rita looks more Irish than Spanish.

Harry Cohn, then production head of Columbia Pictures, signed me to appear in "You Were Never Lovelier" because it had an Argentine background. Hearing my music at the Waldorf-Astoria, he decided it would be ideal for this big-budget, Latin-American-flavored picture. However, Jerome Kern, composer of the score for "You Were Never Lovelier," hit the ceiling when told a rumba band was to play his music. Xavier Cugat meant nothing whatever to Jerome

Kern. But, unfortunately for him, I already had signed my contract.

Tipped off that he was headed for Hollywood to straighten out the difficulty, through an understanding friend I managed to get a copy of Kern's score of "You Were Never Lovelier," which up to that time had not been orchestrated. I made extra-special orchestrations, rehearsed my band secretly for long, fruitful hours. By the time Jerome Kern arrived in Hollywood, I was familiar with every note of his score. He, of course, was unaware of this fact.

Conferring with the Columbia bigwigs, Kern insisted that a rumba band like mine—under contract or not—would ruin the spirit of his music. An audition was hurriedly arranged. Never was I better prepared for a test. After he heard my interpretation of his music, Jerome Kern apologized, immediately changed his opinion and agreed that my band was the best choice possible for "You Were Never Lovelier."

From then on, we became sincere friends. He loved to listen to me play his music in Latin-American tempo.

Upon the completion of "You Were Never Lovelier," a party was given for me on the set by Fred Astaire and Rita Hayworth. The high light of the occasion was when Jerome Kern presented me with a silver baton as a token of his appreciation of my rendition of his score.

Later, when I returned to the Waldorf-Astoria, he gave a special luncheon in the Sert Room in my honor for the music critics and his friends in the music world. Deems Taylor acted as master of ceremonies. As a preview of what to expect in the musical, I played his complete score of "You Were Never Lovelier." Critics and friends cheered and applauded like bobby-soxers.



*I met Dolores Del Rio.*





# 15

Before Carmen and I separated, we occasionally dined in the picturesque restaurant of Don Julio in Greenwich Village, for it was there that the best Mexican meals in New York were served. Besides, rotund Don Julio, a cordial and generous host, supplied flavorful Mexican entertainment, in keeping with his spicy dishes.

Carmen became friendly with one of his featured dancers named Estrellita, a lovely little thing from Mexico City, much along the striking lines of Margo. She was married to a handsome, young Greek metallurgist. One night Estrellita whispered to Carmen that she was giving up her career temporarily, for she expected her first child. She asked Carmen and me if we would be the godparents of the child. We promised we would.

Months later when Estrellita's baby was born, Carmen and I, unbeknownst to her, no longer were living together. Nevertheless, when I received a letter of instruction regarding the christening of the child, I wrote back explaining that although Carmen was in California I myself would definitely be there to be the child's godfather. The very next day I was forced to enter St. Luke's Hospital with a serious strep throat.

I was a very sick maestro. The couple wrote to me at the hospital expressing regret, sympathy and the hope that I would be well enough in time to attend the christening. Peculiarly enough, the morning of my release from the hospital was the very day their child was to be baptized. Feeling none too strong but, nevertheless, fully determined, I went directly from the hospital to the church in Brooklyn to

act as godfather. In keeping with the Greek Orthodox ceremony, I took an extremely active part in the christening. A reception followed. I went to that, too, and had one of the best times of my life, unaware that it was too much for my depleted system. When I returned that night to my hotel room, I felt rather weak but did not call my doctor. He would have advised me to cancel my next day's trip to California for the start of "The Heat's On" with Mae West.

The next morning on my way to Grand Central Station I felt worse. Believing food would strengthen me, I went directly into the dining car of my train. I sat at a table with a young lieutenant who, as if Destiny had directed, turned out to be a doctor. It was not long before I was telling him of my condition. I returned with him to his drawing room. The young army doctor soon had me in good spirits. In fact, all the way to the Coast he kept me in good spirits. The "medicine" he good-naturedly used was whisky, exactly what my weakened intestines could not stand. His treatment was disastrous.

The doctor is often more to be feared than the disease.

In Los Angeles, I was carried off the train on a stretcher and rushed to Good Samaritan Hospital, for I was in danger.

After a preliminary examination, the resident physician summoned Dr. Belt, a kidney specialist attached to the staff. Completing his diagnosis, he frankly told me, that my condition was critical and he would have to operate. Without hesitation, I agreed. The pains were getting sharper. I was growing weaker. Too weak even to moan.

By then, my brother Francis, Carmen and Margo were there, Lillian having called them. I do not remember many of the details. I am told I was delirious from the fever and pain. Lillian wired Bob Diamant, en route to California with my band for our appearance in the forthcoming Mae West picture, "The Heat's On." He wired back that he would make other arrangements about the picture upon arriving in Los Angeles. It was a golden opportunity I must miss.

Sickness is every man's master.

To strengthen and fortify me for the operation, Dr. Belt had nourishment given intravenously. The necessary tubular apparatus was an alarming sight. I was given several injections and a variety of pills. I willingly took whatever was given.

To yield to remedies is half the cure.

Upon his arrival in Los Angeles, Bob Diamant rushed into a public telephone booth to call Good Samaritan Hospital to inquire about my condition. As he put in his nickel, Bob got the most unheard of surprise of his life. He had suddenly hit the jackpot! Apparently, the user of the phone before Bob had paid for a long-distance call which had never been completed, for all at once a total of thirteen dollars in nickels, dimes and quarters gushed out of the return slot. Bob was so stunned he could not remember what he was doing in the telephone booth in the first place.

Bob later got in touch with Columbia Pictures, advised them of the seriousness of my condition, and requested that I be released from "The Heat's On," but that the band appear without me under a new financial arrangement. The band would be billed as Xavier Cugat's Orchestra. Bringing a group of eighteen men from New York to California was a costly venture. Bob was anxious to salvage what he could. Director Gregory Ratoff approved of the idea. Even though I myself was unable to participate, my boys would appear with Mae West.

The day of the operation I became weaker. I knew I never would be able to pull through. I did not have the strength. I had not responded to treatment as Dr. Belt had hoped. Carmen, Margo, my brother Francis, Lillian and Manny Sachs, who had joined them in haste, never left the hospital. They prayed without rest for my recovery. Fall sick and you will see who is your friend and who is not.

As the time for the operation approached, I became alarmingly worse. Dr. Belt decided not to operate. He declared I

like the ghost of Madriguera! I was thin, emaciated and feeble. I relaxed on a cot, when not actually before the camera, with a male nurse in attendance. My kidney poisoning, originally brought on by taking sulfa treatment for a strep throat when my system was allergic to sulfa, had not killed me, but it had given me a weird, spectral appearance.

Health and understanding are the two great blessings of life.

I sent Dr. Belt a caricature of myself as I looked in the hospital bed by the tubular contraption. To this day it hangs in his office in Los Angeles. He is now one of my closest friends, despite the fact that my zealous business manager, Bob Diamant, upon receiving his bill for ten thousand dollars for my case, protested vehemently about the charge. Sins and debts are always more than we think them to be. Bob's vehemence disappeared when he learned that Dr. Belt had a rule of charging ten per cent of the gross income of the patient. At that percentage, he felt I was getting a bargain and paid the ten thousand dollars.

If you pay what you owe, what you're worth you'll know.

I recuperated—of all places—in Tommy Dorsey's apartment, which I rented in his absence from Los Angeles. It was here, of course, that the famous "battle of the balcony" between Jon Hall and Tommy later took place. I was placed on a red meat diet, but since the war was on, it was practically impossible to get steaks in California. However, I entrusted this job to my good friend and drummer, Calderon. It was his daily task to procure at least one steak, no matter what the cost, so that my diet might be carried on and my health regained. He never missed a day. It was his boast that, no matter how difficult they were to get, he had never paid more than ten dollars for a steak.

God never sends mouths but he sends meat.

Eating is an important ceremonial of my daily routine. Food to me is not something to be gulped down or disregarded, as many of my ulcerous friends have done. When

I am anxious to get a particular meal, money is no object. I have chartered a plane and flown for perilous hours to satisfy a fastidious appetite for dinner. At breakfast and lunch I am willing to make allowances, but dinner must be palatably right. I must have wine with it for complete satisfaction. That, of course, is a natural heritage. I have been drinking wine since infancy. My mother, like all good Spanish mothers of her time, always put a few drops in my bottle.

Native Cuban dishes are a weakness of mine. One of these is *arroz con pollo*, or chicken with rice, seasoned with saffron and red peppers. Another is *ajiaco*, a stew of meat and many vegetables. When I lived in Havana, my mother made it often. *Ajiaco* varies throughout Cuba, according to the vegetables available. I remember that my mother made many varieties of soup. In all Latin-American countries, soups are popular. I like *pisto manchego*, which is a casserole of scrambled eggs, tomatoes, red peppers, shrimps, asparagus and peas. Also *caldo gallego*, a boiled dinner of beans, cabbage, potatoes, onions and meat. In Cuba, noted for its seafood, I learned to love *cangrejo moro*, or Moorish crab, served either hot or in a salad. Also *rueda de pargo*, or red snapper stewed in a sauce of tomatoes, onions, peas and green peppers. It is delicious and so is pompano when properly prepared.

But I do like a variety of food. My appetite changes with my mood. For example, when I am in New York City, I dine at no one particular restaurant, but at several, such as the Chambord, Pavillon, Colony, Flamenco, Fornos, Villanova, Red Devil, Ruby Foo, Toots Shor and Gallagher's. New dishes beget new appetites. Instead of feeling drowsy after a meal I feel animated. And here is the secret. I make my appetite yield to reason.

To eat and to scratch, one has but to begin.

I do not believe that cocktails should be served before a meal. If a hostess insists I will take one, but no more. More than one, on an empty stomach, takes away the full pleasure



*Marrying Carmen.*



and enjoyment of the meal. Eat at pleasure, drink by measure. The improvement in the eating habits in the United States is an example the entire world should follow. In no other country is so much thought and care given to a properly balanced diet. Fewer cocktails and more wine, however, is the one further improvement I am anxious to see put into effect. To good eating belongs good drinking.



# 16

While we were in Hollywood, Carmen saw a great deal of Margo, who, incidentally, was progressing fantastically well in her screen career. And not as a dancer, either, but as a dramatic actress. Without her grandmother, who had actually raised her, Margo naturally turned to Carmen for counsel and guidance. Her own mother was in very bad health and living in Mexico. Carmen became more or less of a duenna for Margo, who was being entertained lavishly in Hollywood. Wherever she went, Carmen went, and, believe me, it was no dutiful task for her. She thoroughly enjoyed being part of Margo's countless activities. Besides, she was highly regarded by all of Margo's friends. Away from me, Carmen was delightfully on her own. Once again a distinct and vivid personality.

So it came as no startling surprise when she announced that, rather than go along with me to Chicago for an engagement at the Palmer House, she would stay in Hollywood as Margo's guardian and join me in New York in the fall when I opened the Wedgewood Room. At the time it sounded like a sensible thing and I was agreeable.

Margo, who included Carmen in all of her plans—whereas I could not—was unintentionally drawing her away from me. I did not complain. I knew Carmen, born to be active, was happy. There was no denying that staying in Hollywood would be much more fun and excitement for her than being in Chicago where, as usual, I would be away from her most of the time and, when we were alone, thoroughly exhausted and interested only in sleep. It is the curse of being a band leader's wife.

I went to Chicago and then on to New York to open the Wedgewood Room. The fall arrived, but no Carmen. Only letters from her begging for more time with Margo. Soon the familyish Christmas holidays arrived and still no Carmen from the Coast. Always there was some plausible, well-conceived excuse, with the unhappy result that the fall passed and before long the familyish Christmas holidays arrived. It was our first holiday season away from each other. Not that I am a sentimentalist, but in Carmen's absence, I spent a miserable Christmas and an unhappy New Year's. My brother Albert and his sympathetic wife, Lolita, were my guests during the holidays. With them I did not have to pretend. I could feel sorry for myself and they understood.

Time, wind, women and fortune are ever changing.

Carmen eventually broke away from Margo and joined me in the spring. We behaved like strangers at first, warmth and affection setting in slowly. We no longer had our apartment and its privacy on Beekman Place. We were again living in the Waldorf-Astoria, leases being the documents of the devil that they are. Carmen still hated hotel life, continued to resent my society friends and loathed being alone while I furthered my business. She longed to return to California, to the good times with Margo. It seemed cruel keeping her away.

It is more difficult to rule a wife than a kingdom.

In the midst of our marital unrest, Lucius Boomer and Rene Black announced that they were giving me a testimonial dinner. More cause for Carmen to be envious! Ted Saucier helped with the elaborate arrangements and list of guests to be invited. The dinner was given with pomp and ceremony in the Sert Room, closed that particular night to the public.

It was as if my "Who's Who" caricatures had miraculously come to life for the occasion. Oscar of the Waldorf personally supervised the ordering and preparation of a lavish epicurean dinner, served by especially selected waiters.

Boomer unlocked his rarest wines and liqueurs. Rene Black took charge of the one hundred and one infinite details of the banquet. Flattering speeches were made by Boomer, Black and other Waldorf-Astoria executives. They insisted that the name Xavier Cugat had become synonymous with Waldorf-Astoria. And who was I to contradict? I was presented with gifts, several purses and, on top of it all, a solid gold testimonial scroll from President Boomer.

I was happy that Carmen was by my side to share in the glory of it all. I felt, too, that it proved my hours away from her had been rather justified. As the evening wore on and formality wore off, Rene Black insisted upon singing "*Vesti la Giubba*," the famous Lament of Pagliaccio, to the impromptu accompaniment of my Latin-American rhythms. I am sure my dear departed friend, Enrico Caruso, actually spun in his grave.

As the months passed, I did my best to stop Carmen and me from drifting farther apart. For all theater and concert engagements I insisted that Carmen be included, along with Lina Romay, and given equal billing. For example, when I was offered a return engagement at the Paramount Theater, I told Bob Weitman, its manager, I would not accept unless Carmen Castillo was prominently featured in the act. It wasn't to Weitman's liking. Lina Romay was enjoying tremendous popularity. He felt it was bad showmanship and would antagonize audiences to limit Lina's time on the stage to make room for Carmen. However, I insisted and he consented.

Once the first show was over I knew he was right. It was terribly unfair to have Carmen compete with a favorite like youthful Lina Romay. Carmen simply could not sing the songs as effectively, no matter how I forced myself and others to believe she could. From that day on I decided to no longer include and humiliate Carmen in my stage presentations.

Shortly after that fiasco, Carmen returned to Hollywood.

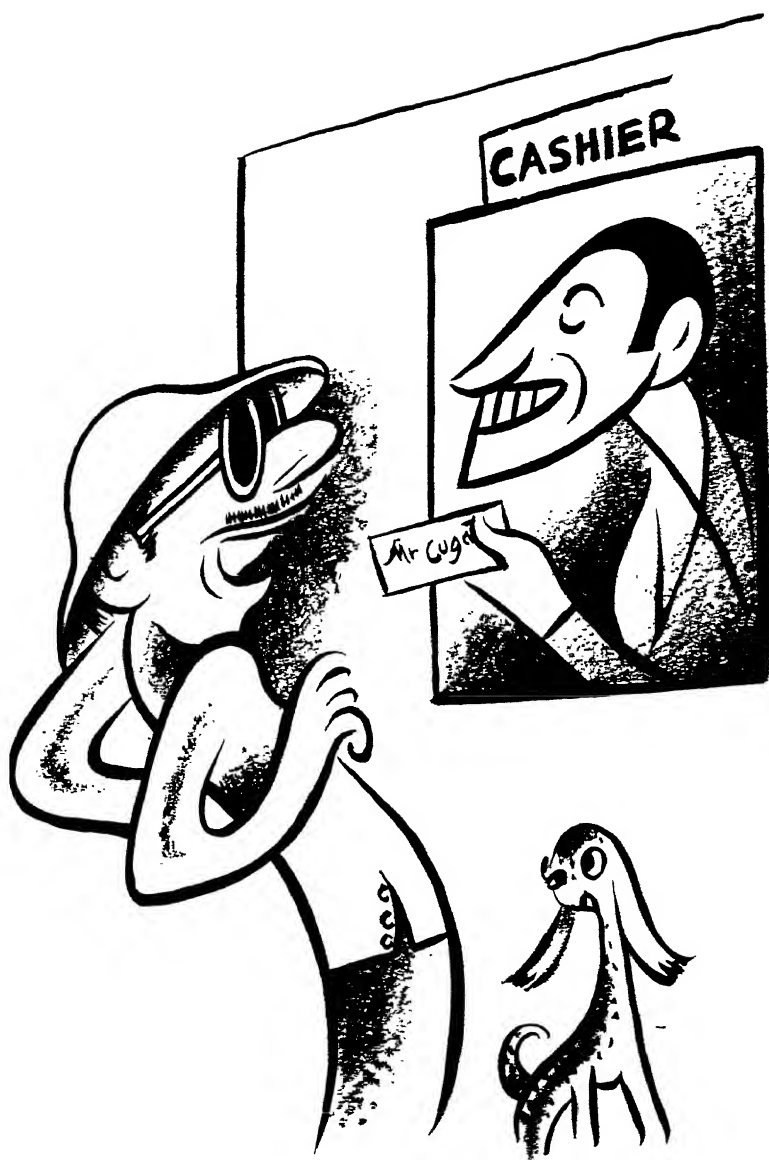
Later, she consulted with her attorney, Jerry Geisler, regarding a divorce and property settlement. It cost me a fortune.

When you are an anvil bear, when you are a hammer strike.

Not long after the release of "You Were Never Lovelier," I met Louis B. Mayer, powerful head of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer in an elevator in the Waldorf-Astoria. Although we had never been introduced, he genially reached out his hand and congratulated me on my performance. He advised me always to get an acting role, declaring I had just the personality for it. Little did Louis B. Mayer realize then that, quite by accident, I soon would be signing a long-term contract with his mammoth organization.

Back on the West Coast, he heard so much enthusiasm about the nation being dance band crazy that he went down to the Palladium, famous Los Angeles dance hall, to see for himself. Thoroughly convinced, Louis B. Mayer immediately signed the twelve best bands in the nation, which, of course, included my organization. Since Columbia had not taken up my option, I signed with MGM. However, when Columbia heard of it, legal action was threatened. The threat was never carried out, for Columbia found it actually had no case and promptly dropped the matter. Incidentally, of the twelve dance bands signed by MGM, I am the only one still under contract.

My first picture for the studio was Joe Pasternak's "Two Girls and a Sailor," with Van Johnson, June Allyson and Gloria De Haven in 1944. Then followed "Bathing Beauty," with Esther Williams and Red Skelton, and "Weekend at the Waldorf," with Ginger Rogers, Lana Turner, Walter Pidgeon and Van Johnson, which Arthur Hornblow produced and Robert Leonard directed. I knew Bob from the days when my brother Francis worked as his art director on Mae Murray's "Fascination." I did a caricature of him, during its making, with which he was so well pleased that he promised someday to return the favor.



*Each week I would go to get my check at the old  
Pathé Studios.*



It is by observing a man's faults that one may come to know his virtues.

When I appeared, during the war, in "Stage Door Canteen" for Warner Brothers, I danced the rumba with my vocalist, Lina Roday. I love to dance it. Am very proud, in fact, of the way I have mastered it. Lina, of course, was also with me in "Weekend at the Waldorf." I had a comedy scene in the film in which I fire her. She used the standard comedy line "You can't fire me, I quit." Director Bob Leonard insisted upon inserting the scene simply because in real life my firing of Lina was a regular occurrence. During the time she worked for me I discharged Lina no less than twenty-two times! Each time, on the pleas of her mild-mannered father, employed in the Mexican Consulate in Manhattan, and my discerning business manager, Bob Diamant, I took her back. Lina would return to work promising to do exactly as I asked.

But, believe me, he who takes an eel by the tail and a woman at her word may say he holds nothing.

Walter Pidgeon and I had many laughs together during the filming of "Weekend at the Waldorf," he having the same tastes in wit, humor and people as I. He collects Limericks and recites them with an intensity and interpretation worthy of a dramatic script. For each one of his Limericks, I entertained him with one of my caricatures.

I played an engagement at Ciro's and have done likewise on each succeeding stay in Hollywood. It never fails to remind me of my early days at the Coconut Grove, for many of the same familiar faces, still important on the screen, are always among the dancers on the crowded floor.

At Ciro's, as at other places, I encouraged the dancing of the rumba by starting to play an American foxtrot, then suddenly changing to a rumba rhythm. This enabled the dancers to feel how easy it is to do.

There is no popular American song which cannot be played as a rumba. It is just a matter of changing the ac-

cented beat. In fact, the average dancer can learn to rumba in twenty minutes.

It was during the making of "Holiday in Mexico" that I first met beautiful Lorraine Allen. She had the role of a housemaid in the film. I had seen and admired her on the set but had never engaged her in conversation until one evening, Walter Winchell, upon her request, brought her to Ciro's to hear me play. Knowing Walter from my days at the Waldorf-Astoria it was not long before I was formally introduced to Lorraine. Aware that she and Walter were just good friends, I did not feel forward in asking Lorraine if she would have lunch the following day with me in the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer commissary. She accepted the invitation.

The first thing necessary to win the heart of a woman is the opportunity.

From that memorable day on, having lunch together at the commissary became almost obligatory for Lorraine. I simply could not enjoy my lunch unless she were there. So rather than have me miserable she was my daily companion at the luncheon table. The more I saw of Lorraine, the more I wanted to be with her. She drew attention wherever she went. I was proud to be seen with her. Until our string of luncheon dates started, she had been one of the most sought-after and dated girls in Hollywood. She gradually shelved this popularity for she felt more at ease with me than with any other man she knew. I loved her flattery and, let's face it, my enviable status. Although Lorraine hailed from Chicago, she might just as well have come from Barcelona. She has all of the beauty requisites that intrigue a Latin-American. Nevertheless, it was not her beauty alone that attracted me, but her wise evaluation of things in general. She possessed a sense of humor like my own; a perception and sense of management to rival a big business magnet's. Lorraine's timing was flawless. She knew just when to laugh, just when to cry, just when to be serious, just when to be lighthearted and gay. I had never known anyone who fit so comfortably



into my own varying moods. And she likes to eat! Which I adore. Because when I used to go out with some American girl I had to hold back my appetite or be considered a pig—as she ate only celery and a carrot!

He is happy who knows his good fortune.

Lorraine was unselfish, unassuming, unaffected and took delight in extending herself to put others at ease. She had cultivated the tender and amiable qualities which in Carmen had remained untouched and dormant. She fulfilled the promise of her impressive appearance. Fortunately, Lorraine did not take her film career seriously. Yet I am confident had she concentrated on it, Lorraine would have progressed notably. She gave me a feeling that she would have been equally as interested in me if I were a mere struggling violinist no one ever heard of and no one ever would. I knew if ever I remarried, Lorraine must be my wife.

Victor Hugo had said it so well—"The greatest happiness of life is the conviction that we are loved, loved for ourselves—say rather, loved in spite of ourselves."

Following this success, I went into "This Time for Keeps," another natural, and then into "No Leave, No Love," again with Van Johnson. Director George Sidney said that I must never cease to be Xavier Cugat in a picture. That once I stop being myself I will realize how poor an actor I am! I instituted a new fashion in films with my real-life appearance in "You Were Never Lovelier." Instead of attempting to play a fictitious band leader, I was myself, Xavier Cugat. That's precisely what I have since done to advantage in all of my other pictures. I paved the way for Lauritz Melchior, José Iturbi and other artists to be themselves when they appear on the screen.

My first Hollywood Bowl concert was in the late summer of 1945. I presented a program of Latin-American music and offered as my special vocalists, the good-looking, talented Carlos Ramirez and the blond, sprightly Marina Koshetz, two thoroughbred artists. The turnout was overwhelmingly

large and broke all previous Bowl attendance records. After my first two numbers, the management stopped the show for fifteen minutes to allow as many more as possible of the clamoring, overflow crowd to cram in. A week later, I was obliged to repeat the concert for those unable to get into the Bowl for the original show. However, what happened was that those who attended my first performance swarmed right back again for the second as well, and many who missed the first also missed the second concert.

I gave still another Hollywood Bowl concert in the late summer of 1947. I augmented my regular band of thirty-two pieces with a bow symphony orchestra and a chorus of eighty mixed voices. Once more I played Latin-American music only. Every country south of the border was represented among my musicians. For example, I had a clarinetist from the Philippines and a French horn player from Ireland. I had as my vocalist, vivacious Betty Reilly, who was appearing with me at the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios in "On an Island With You," and Mexico's outstanding romantic tenor, Nicolás Urcelay, who flew up from Mexico City especially for the event. I also spotlighted my trumpet virtuoso, Raphael Mendez, unmatched among Latin-American musicians. The concert was broadcast and short-waved to all South and Central American countries and to parts of Europe as well. Over twenty-two thousand people jammed into the Bowl and thousands more were left disgruntled outside. Once again, I was happily forced to give a repeat concert. And once again, many who could not get in the first time did not get in the second time, either, because thousands and thousands of repeaters came again for the second time.

Speaking of concerts, in 1946 I established a concert record by giving sixty-three in sixty-three days, covering ten thousand miles in so doing.

I had all sorts of experiences on this tour. One occurred while traveling through the Southwest. I had trouble in

getting my dog into a hotel with me. In Dallas, Texas, at its best hotel, where I had always been given the presidential suite, they refused to admit me on account of my dog. I tried the other hotels, but no dogs were allowed there either. At last I solved the problem by buying a baby's cap and a little blanket and passing the dog off as a little baby.

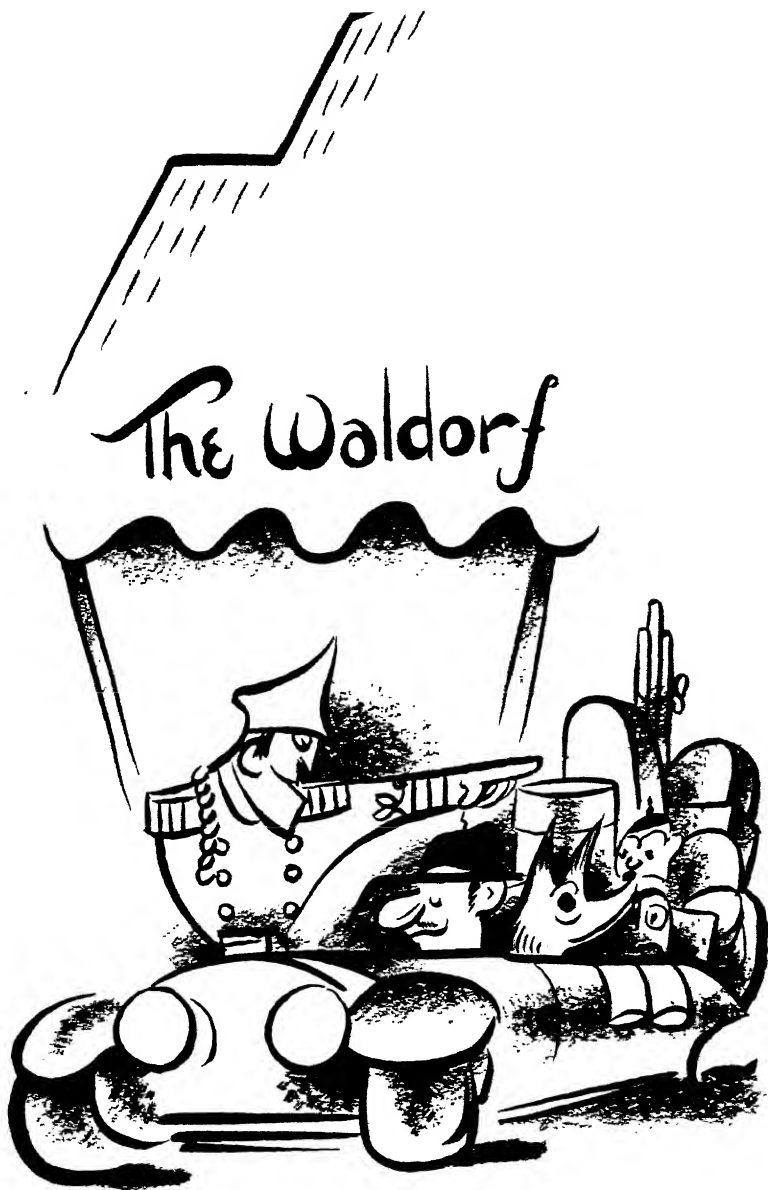
# 17

One of my best friends is pleasantly energetic Manny Sachs. I first met him in 1933 when he was assigned by Music Corporation of America to manage my recording activities.

Manny was in complete charge of that important department for MCA. He negotiated a contract with Victor's Eli Oberstein and, on August 15, 1933, in the company's Twenty-fourth Street studios in Manhattan, I recorded six "sides." They were "Caminito," a tango, and "Dusk"; "Ombo," a rumba, and "My Shawl," my theme song; "Gypsy Airs," a tango, and "Rancho Grande." Of the three, my coupling of "My Shawl" and "Ombo" attained the biggest sale. A new field had opened up its arms to me. Opened them wide and handsomely.

During the next six years, my record sales mounted portentously in all sections of the nation. Specialized though it was, no area disliked my music. Although my disc sales exceeded all expectations, Manny felt my profits, in comparison, were far below expectancy. He subsequently asked for more money from Victor, but since their budget could not be increased, he was turned down.

Therefore, when my contract expired in 1937, rather than renew with Victor, I signed with Columbia, Manny having procured for me a much sounder and better-paying contract, one that offered extensive advertising and exploitation of all my releases. My first record for Columbia hit the market in November, 1940. Manny, himself, selected the songs: "Make It Another Old-Fashioned, Please," oddly enough a beguine, and "Ali Baba," a rumba. The record got me off to a marvelous start with Columbia. I followed this release with "Mama



*The doorman at the Waldorf told me to get out  
of the way.*

Inez" and "The Peanut Vendor." This, too, soared in sales. I followed with "Kashmiri Love Song" and "In a Persian Market," breathing new life and interest into these old favorites. I have since made over two hundred records for Columbia. Not one has failed to make substantial profits.

My most successful was "Babalu" which I coupled with "Bambarito." Other pronounced hits were: "Rumba Rhapsody" and "Is It Taboo"; "Intermezzo" and "Rendezvous in Rio"; "Brazil" and "Chiu-Chiu"; "Walter Winchell Rumba" and "Oye Negra"; "South America, Take It Away" and "Chiquita Banana," with Buddy Clark as vocalist; "You, So It's You" and "I'll Never Love Again," with luscious Dinah Shore; "My Shawl" and "Stars in Your Eyes," with heart-throbber Frank Sinatra. My tango, rumba and conga albums were best sellers, too.

In making a recording for Columbia, I not only wax a record for the American market, but also one for the Latin-American trade. In many instances, the one I make for the American market is also acceptable for the Latin-American market. Such as "Babalu" and "Bambarito." It is only when I couple a Latin-American tune with a distinctly American tune, like "Make It Another Old-Fashioned, Please," the meaning of which is vague in Latin America, that I make a substitution suitable for the south of the border fans.

The explanation of why I have never taken my band on an extended tour of South and Central America is to avoid serious union trouble, plus the fact that my musicians, even if difficult labor conditions did not exist, refuse to be away for an excessive length of time from their families and loved ones. Years ago, when James C. Petrillo banned the appearance in this country of the Mexican Typica Orchestra and hurried it back to Mexico, Lombardo Toledano, the John L. Lewis of Latin-American countries, vowed, in retaliation, that no American orchestra would ever have smooth sailing south of the border. Nonetheless, there is not one Latin-American country to which I have not been cordially invited.

I have been forced to turn down all invitations because of the unfavorable circumstances involved.

Three months after I signed with Columbia, the alive and alert organization offered Manny Sachs its vice-presidency, a position he has scrupulously filled ever since leaving MCA. Working with an old friend, such as Manny, naturally, makes the task more enjoyable. In enjoying it so much, I work without complaint or limitation.

I look forward to a recording date for Columbia. Mitchell Ayres, a personable and attractive musician who once headed his own dance orchestra, is the popular music director for Columbia Records. There are few men in the profession as familiar with its intricacies as patient and benevolent Mitch.

My chief objective in making a recording is to get as much variety and color into it as possible.

To accomplish this I do not use an accepted seating setup when I record. That is, I arrange my musicians more strategically around the microphones than does any other recording orchestra. I have fanatically studied the art of setup and know to the half inch where each one of my men should be placed in order to get the full essence of their music. There is absolutely no guesswork or compromise.

Another vital factor I stress is the proper balance of my band. I make certain that no instrument is neglected in an arrangement before asking my band to rehearse it. The all-for-one and one-for-all team spirit is encouraged. I have no favorite instrumentalists. They are all important. I never allow my own personality to get whimsical and interfere with my style of music. I expect the same stability from all of my men. I demand that all of them be musicians' musicians. Another thing, the melodic flavor is never missing in any of my numbers.

In my years of training as a musician I fortunately did not concentrate solely on the study of the violin. I studied music in general. Familiarized myself with each instrument in an

orchestra—with bountiful results. I can rightfully tell any musician in my band precisely what I want of him. I can speak his language, no matter what instrument he plays. Again, being both a composer and arranger myself is invaluable. With my arrangers, there is no indecision whatever. I know to a note what I want and how they should arrange it.

Manny Sachs believes the basis of my success is that no other Latin-American orchestra has perfected the American touch in presenting Latin-American tunes. Other bands stress the native side. I do not. Yet I do not emphasize the American side either. I give a distinctive and colorful blending, a formula no other leader has yet had the good fortune to discover.

Shortly after I went with Columbia Records, I was playing an engagement in the Palmer House in Chicago. Manny Sachs excitedly flew out from New York with an English recording of "Sleepy Lagoon," played by Eric Coates and his orchestra. Manny had bought the American rights and insisted that an immediate American recording of it would be a sensation. Upon hearing the song, I agreed with Manny. No time was to be lost in putting it on wax for Columbia. I immediately had my arrangers work out an orchestration, I lined up Buddy Clark as my vocalist, satisfactorily rehearsed not only "Sleepy Lagoon," but the number to be coupled with it, "Nightingale," an original composition of mine, and made the recording in Columbia's Chicago studios, all within twenty-four hours. It was on sale throughout the country four weeks later, a fantastic record in record-making.

At my recording sessions I invariably bring along one or two of my dogs. At first, it upset Manny and Mitch to the extent that they refused to proceed with the session. They feared one of my dogs would bark or whine during a waxing and spoil what might have been the best "take" of any. Or the dogs might run loose about the studio, disrupting everyone's peace of mind. To them it was not sensible to have



unpredictable dogs around at a recording session where absolute quite is essential. I argued that my dogs would be perfectly still and motionless if I gave them the command and, furthermore, my secretary Lillian would stand close by to see that my command was carried out. Somehow I had to have them there, just as I have always had them with me during a radio broadcast. They are as much a defining part of me as my beret. I can say boastfully that never once have my dogs been a nuisance. Still I must admit that even to this day Manny and Mitch continue to be on edge, expecting at least a peep to eventually pop out and spoil a perfect "take." Frankly, I expect the peep to pop myself.

Around the Columbia Recording Studios, purely out of eagerness, I have a favorite expression in meeting Manny: "I love you like a brother, Manny, but how many records did I sell?" It was Manny, incidentally, who detected why I once had trouble in getting an augmented orchestra to give me exactly the effect that I wanted. I stopped the rehearsal, singled out certain musicians and in right-to-the-point language told them what was wrong and how it was to be done right. I was not cross or irritated. Simply prolific with my explanation of how I wanted a certain song played. I finished with my instructions, again started the number and, to my utter surprise and amazement, the same mistakes were committed. It was Manny who reminded me that being specific and prolific was all very fine, but when I got away from simple Spanish words I was lost, since my augmented band was composed of musicians from many different Latin-American countries and consequently each understood only his own variation of Spanish.

I remember a Columbia recording I did of "Maria Elena." It was a waltz composed in 1929 by Lorenzo Barcelata, a fantastic Mexico City character who named his song "Maria Elena" in honor of President Portes Gil's wife. It was my good friend, Fernando Castro, an executive of the Southern Music Publishing Company, who brought out the song. He

had met Barcelata in Mexico City during a visit to the music company's office. At the time, the composer wanted to buy back his shelved "Maria Elena," for the two hundred pesos, having waited eleven years for its publication. He wanted to take it to another music publisher.

Castro dusted off the number and had it played. Realizing its terrific possibilities, instead of selling back the number to Barcelata he gave him a new and better contract. "Maria Elena" soon became popular in Mexico and other Latin-American countries. And then, through Castro's efforts, was brought to the United States where it caught on equally well.

Southern Music invited Barcelata to this country. The irascible composer, once destitute, was given thirty-five thousand dollars in royalties. He and his wife spent it all foolishly within three weeks, returning to Mexico City as they had left. Barcelata died penniless in the arms of Fernando Castro, who had hurriedly flown to Mexico City, but too late, to again be of help.

If there were neither fools nor knaves in the world, all people would be of one mind.

In my recording of a song for Columbia, before my appearance in the recording studios I carefully go over the musical arrangement to be used. It is exactly rehearsed beforehand. However, upon arrival for the recording, I play it through a few times for Manny and Mitch's approval before a test record is made. A few helpful last-minute changes are sometimes made in the arrangement.

A wise man changes his mind, a fool never.

The test recording is then started. This record is made primarily for timing and proper balance of the band and microphones. Without delay, the test record is played back. I listen with Manny and Mitch, correct what is wrong and suggest what can be improved. The sound engineer is consulted, too, for his technical advice is invaluable. Another recording is then begun with the hope that it will be good enough for a "take." Sometimes a song is acceptable after

the first "take." Other times, I make five or six records before one is fully satisfactory to Manny, Mitch and me.

Despite my insistence on perfection, no matter how long it takes to achieve, there remains an over-all feeling of levity and good fellowship throughout a recording. I hold open discussion on each playback with my musicians and encourage their suggestions. My boys are in on every move I make. Never is a change made without my first explaining to them why it must be made.

Kiss ardently the hand you cannot cut off.

An executive at MCA who has done more than his share for me is Sonny Werblin, who has been in the music business longer than he cares to admit. He is married to the former Leah Ray, once vocalist for Phil Harris when his band played at the Cocomanut Grove and later at the Waldorf-Astoria. I knew Leah well in those days, admired her artistry, beauty and charm. Her future dazzled with promise. In fact, Leah was soon put under contract by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. It was then that she met and fell in love with Sonny Werblin. He asked her to marry him. Leah, believing she could not do two important things well at the same time, felt marriage to Sonny meant the end of her zooming career. Sonny left the decision entirely up to her. To his satisfaction and happiness, Leah gave up show business for domesticity without regret. She could not be happier. What Leah did, of course, is exactly what I wanted Carmen to do. But she never would. Leah often advised Carmen to follow in her footsteps, but she stubbornly would not give up her none-too-promising career for what could have been an ideal marriage.

Speaking of marriage, Margo, of course, married matinee idol Francis Lederer. I knew from the start it could not last. Francis was temperamentally unsuited for Margo. You cannot take a highly charged Czecho-Slovakian such as he and marry him to a girl of Margo's explosive Mexican tendencies. They were divorced after two quarrelsome years of married life. Margo is now happily married to affable screen actor



*Lobo misbehaves in the lobby of the Waldorf.*



Eddie Albert and has given up her stardom. I wonder if Margo will remain the quiet housewife for long? If ever a girl had show business pulsating in her veins, it is sagacious Margo. I do not believe she will stay away from the life which claimed her for its own when she was but a child. She will find a way of successfully combining marriage and career.

When Margo was an outstanding and opulent Broadway stage favorite in such hits as *Winterset*, *Mask of Kings*, and later *A Bell For Adano*, she lost none of the enthusiasm she had as the adorable child who enthralled Rene Black at the casino in Tia Juana. For example, when I had to broadcast a spirited *paso doble* number, nothing pleased her more than to be invited to bring her castanets to the studio. No one played them as sharply as Margo, and she knew it. She loved to join my orchestra, unannounced for the number, then rush back to her stage play. She always managed to rearrange her affairs and have time for the castanets. Once when I was broadcasting in San Francisco and was doing a *paso doble* number, Margo cheerfully drove all the way from Los Angeles to play castanets on my program.

The most startling broadcast I ever did will long be remembered by the studio audience which could not believe its eyes and ears. To begin with, after a discordant musical introduction, I casually went on the air five minutes late. The announcer blithely explained that more important things had come up and, besides, I was bored with broadcasts anyway. From there on a series of incredible shenanigans and high jinks took place that, in contrast, would have made Spike Jones and his zany orchestra sound as sane and dignified as the New York Philharmonic. When I nonchalantly went off the air ten minutes ahead of time, the amazed studio audience had about all it could take, so to relieve the strain and allow relaxation I let them in on a secret. I had not been on the air at all! My time, in a last-minute switch, had been given over to an emergency fireside chat by Presi-

Costello took sick, Bud Abbott, his partner for twenty-five years, refused to continue without him.

In 1945, Proctor and Gamble sponsored me over N.B.C. on its Drene show with Rudy Vallee. Rudy has long been a friend of mine. Back in 1929, when he had his famed Villa Vallee on East Sixtieth Street, he did much to help popularize the tango and rumba in the East. Rudy, the Frank Sinatra of his day, had just as many swooners as Frank boasts today. On November 20, 1946, I ended a two-year contract with Coca-Cola, broadcasting as one of its three Spotlight Bands each Wednesday night over the Mutual network.

I did many guest appearances over N.B.C. Included were the Fitch Bandwagon, the Palmolive Party, Duffy's Tavern, Hildegard's Raleigh Room, the Chesterfield Supper Club and Bill Stern's Sports program, on which I was interviewed on bullfighting. I once played "The Bee" on a guest appearance and called myself the "South American Jack Benny." I never got a better laugh.

On my recent radio program over C.B.S. for Eversharp, in which I presented music with a Latin-American accent, I acted as my own master of ceremonies. I intend to do more of this in future series, for the response of encouragement from listeners was too great to overlook.

# 18

During my busy year of 1941 I hired, as personal manager, genial Lou Mindling, who had been with the Music Corporation of America's band department for six years. So well pleased had I been with his conscientious handling of me at the Waldorf-Astoria for MCA that I made Lou a tempting offer to work exclusively as my personal manager. My activities required that I get one. MCA, still managing my contractual affairs in general, was reluctant to release him, but, realizing how good it would be for me, one of its best money-makers, relented and gave him its blessing and a farewell party. Unfortunately, he was with me for only one year. Lou, in turn, left me to sign a contract with Uncle Sam.

He used to get a terrific kick out of my unexpected impersonations of significant characters we both knew. A man I was markedly adept at mimicking was Lucius Boomer, president of the Waldorf-Astoria. He was an easy one. All it entailed was the gesture of putting on pince-nez glasses, plus the business of taking out a notebook and pencil and gravely making notes, obvious characteristics of Boomer. I was on the bandstand in the Sert Room one evening when Lou entered later than usual. I slyly proceeded to give, for his especial benefit, my impersonation of Boomer making a notation of his tardiness. I did not get the laugh from Lou I expected. In fact, it was merely a well-controlled smile, accompanied by a sharp glance toward the other entrance of the room. It was Lou's polite way of pointing. I looked. There stood Mr. Boomer. Incensed at my public impersonation, he promptly put on his pince-nez glasses, took out his



notebook and pencil and made a hurried notation. I later found out it read, "Cugat must be discharged!"

Having a sense of humor in show business, just as in any other endeavor, is essential to sanity. Without it, a person loses flexibility, tightens up and is apt to drown in the treacherous channel of solemnity. Situations are often saved simply by smiling and saying, "So what?"

He is not laughed at who laughs at himself first.

For example, a pianist of mine, José Curbelo, composed a number called "Cui-Cui," for which I did the lyrics, lent a helping hand and shared in the royalties. The number, properly plugged, caught on very well. When the looked-for royalties were not on time, instead of going direct to the publisher with my complaint, I cornered my friend Fernando Castro of Southern Music. I berated him unreasonably, loudly condemning the entire music publishing business. Anyone listening in would have thought Southern Music had published "Cui-Cui" and that Castro himself had stolen the royalties. Gradually, he quieted me down, my harangue petered out and I left apologetically, feeling I had accomplished nothing except letting off of steam.

He who has no shame has no conscience.

When I saw Castro later on that night in the Sert Room of the Waldorf-Astoria, I told him that apparently the walls of his office have ears, for that very evening, by special messenger, came the slightly overdue check for royalties on "Cui-Cui." Castro agreed that his walls might have ears, but reminded me that mere coincidences are much more prevalent than walls with ears.

The next day I learned that Castro, who mimicked me as expertly as I mimicked Boomer, pretending he was Cugat, had telephoned the publisher of "Cui-Cui," repeated word for word my vehement tirade and got immediate results.

Many people in show business believe that Enric Madriguera and I are not the best of friends. This is not true. For professional advantages, we rib each other just as gainfully

as Jack Benny and Fred Allen do over the air waves. Each knows it is an infallible way of getting a laugh and attention. I have great respect for Enric as a musician and hold his friendship dearly. Using him as the butt of my jokes and his doing likewise in exchange, is never done maliciously, but in good, sure-fire fun.

Walking along Michigan Boulevard one windy Chicago day with Fernando Castro and my police dog, Moro, Castro asked for the leash. As we walked along, he suddenly had trouble keeping Moro under control. My dog pulled so hard on the leash to get away that Castro feared he would be dragged headlong into the gutter.

"What's wrong with your dog, Cugat?" he demanded. "Why has he become so vicious?"

"Can't you see," I said, pointing to a mean, mangy, moth-eaten mutt on the other side of the street, "Moro is trying to get at Madriguera?"

Castro knew it was strictly a gag. But said to the wrong person, it would have caused trouble.

At band rehearsals, when one of my musicians would make a mistake, instead of bawling him out, I would look sternly at him, point a finger toward the door and exclaim, "Will Mr. Madriguera please leave the room?"

I am told Enric has similar gags about me, all good-naturedly aimed for a waggish bull's-eye.

When I go on the air I am always announced as "The Rumba King." Who started this I really don't know, but it was at the time when kings were popular—The King of Jazz, The King of Waltzes, etc., etc. So Madriguera, broadcasting then for another network, went on the air as "The Rumba King." I immediately had my title changed to "Emperor of the Rumba."

It's no surprise that people think Enric and I are not the best of friends.

One of the best jokes played on me as a musician took place while I was working for Vincent Lopez at the Casa



*The Maharajah came to the Waldorf every night  
to hear my music.*



Lopez on Broadway. Up until the time that I worked for Vincent, I had had scant experience with the gentler sex. Other musicians in the band kidded me incessantly about being girl shy and inexperienced. I was determined to overcome their disdain. So one evening when one of the boys told me that I had received a telephone call from a young lady who wanted me to call her back, I pretended she was one of the most beautiful in New York, although I knew a mistake had been made as her name was totally unknown to me. Carrying out my pretense, I called her back, being as friendly as I could be. It developed I had never met her, but she knew other boys in the band, admired my playing and was anxious for me to call on her the following Sunday afternoon. I promised I would. The boys who knew her assured me that if I wanted to make a hit when I called, instead of bringing the customary flowers or candy, I should bring a basket of fruit. She loved fruit. It all sounded intriguing. I was overanxious for Sunday afternoon to arrive. It finally did. I stopped at a fruit stand and bought quite an assortment. I was determined to be impressive. Determined to win myself a girl. I bought bananas, apples, peaches, pears, grapes, plums and oranges. My arms were overloaded with packages as I rang the doorbell of the young lady's apartment. I felt like Santa Claus.

She opened the door and was every bit as lovely as the boys had said. Her eyes popped with joy and her mouth watered at the sight of all of the fruit I had brought for her. As I entered the apartment, however, my heartbeat went wild, my face caught fire, my breathing got clogged. I discovered one thing the boys had failed to tell me. She was married! From a rear bedroom, her husband called out angrily, demanding to know who it was. When she called back that it was a musician friend of hers he let loose with an outburst of profanity, obscenities and threats the like of which I had never heard from even musicians. There is no answer for "Get out of my house!" and "What do you want

with my wife?" I spun on my heel, shot out the door clutching my bags of fruit, leaped down the stairs, dropping an orange here, a pear or two there in my flight, and dashed to the sidewalk, smack into the arms of my alleged friends, the boys from the Lopez band. They were roaring with laughter as they grabbed me and would not let go. I was white with fear. I could hear the husband's footfalls coming down the steps, his voice still muttering those awful words and his threats to bash my head in with a baseball bat.

"Look out, here he comes!" shouted one of the musicians.

Knowing the husband was upon me, I dropped my bags of fruit and turned to defend myself the best I could. I was stunned! There standing before me, growling as much like an enraged husband as he could, was Vincent Lopez himself, who had impishly planned the entire prank.

Who laughs at others' ills, has his own behind the door.

Another bit of humor that unhappily backfired on me occurred one evening in the Wedgewood Room of the Waldorf-Astoria when Mischa Borr and his orchestra was my relief band. As I prepared to leave the bandstand, I announced to the dancers, quite whimsically, that Mischa Borr and his Borrs would now take over and play for them. Had it been Guy Lombardo or Eddy Duchin or Benny Goodman, it would not have been such a pointed remark, for Lombardos or Duchins or Goodmans would not have sounded insulting. But Borrs! Mischa would not speak to me for a month afterward.

The grim determination and ceaseless drive I inherited from my father often have been mistaken for undue aggressiveness and pushiness. My will to progress and succeed never relaxes. When my contract with Columbia Records was about to expire I warned Manny Sachs, busy with other matters, of the expiration date. I saw no cause for red-tape delay. The day my renewal option was to be taken up, the delaying tactics were still in order. I took immediate advantage of the lapse and did a recording date with Bing

Crosby. I made four "sides" with Bing, two of them, "Bahia" and "You Belong to My Heart," becoming outstanding Decca hits. I was about to dicker with Decca when my new contract from Columbia arrived without further delay. I signed it.

When Paramount Pictures bought the screen rights of the book, *Mr. and Mrs. Cugat*, I threatened legal action if they made a movie of it, convinced it would be detrimental to my career. Much legal wrangling followed between my attorneys and Paramount's. It eventually and mutually was agreed that all detrimental parts be deleted from the script and I be paid eighty thousand dollars for their use of the title *Mr. and Mrs. Cugat* for a movie. Paramount, after paying me eighty thousand dollars, changed the title and released the picture as "Are Husbands Necessary?"

While Lou Mindling was with me, Adele Mara, now starring in films for Republic Pictures, was a dancer and vocalist with my band. Her real name is Adelaida Delgado. I gave her the Adele Mara. Her father was Spanish. Her mother Irish. Adele, born in Dearborn, Michigan, started her career in Detroit where I first saw her and offered her a job with my orchestra. She stayed with me for only one summer at the Starlight Roof, the reason being that Carmen could never quite accept her youthful vivacity and the daughterly fuss she made over me.

During the ration days of the war, when it was almost impossible to get a taxicab in New York City, getting back and forth to the Waldorf-Astoria from radio broadcasts, theater dates and benefits threatened to be a problem for the musicians and me. But Bob Diamant came forth with an ingenious plan. He made a deal with a neighborhood funeral parlor to supply four of its funeral coaches any night we needed them. Since the cars were in use only during the day, and always free at night when funerals are never held, the undertaker was delighted to get the extra business. My boys and I would dash off the bandstand into the wait-

gaged by Harvey Firestone, Jr., to play at a dance for his employees. It was a gigantic affair, in the midst of which Mr. Firestone timidly approached and quietly took me to one side. Like any other adoring father, he halting explained that his daughter, Elizabeth, then around nineteen, had composed a song and he wondered if I would be good enough to look it over and give an opinion. It was called "Night." Before the evening was over I studied the song and, to my amazement, found nothing whatever amateurish about its composition. I liked it so much that I promised Mr. Firestone I would play his daughter's song on my very next coast-to-coast broadcast. Although it was but a day or so later, one of my arrangers, Carlos Palos, made a swift and sparkling arrangement and I did play Elizabeth Firestone's "Night," in rumba tempo on my very next broadcast.

Mention of "Night" brings to mind that the musical signature I originated for Camel Cigarettes broadcasts—and which is still being used—was taken from the first few notes of an original composition of mine called "Tonight."

While on the Coca-Cola program, I did my broadcasts from army camps and naval bases throughout the nation, it being the good will policy of the sponsor. Often it meant long, uncertain bus trips into isolated districts and the possibility that, under such unfavorable conditions, the broadcast would never go on. For this reason, Coca-Cola kept within easy reach in Radio City two half-hour recorded programs of my music for emergency purposes.

It was while touring somewhere in Southern California that my boys and I arrived by unchartered bus at an army camp with about two hours to spare before our scheduled nationwide broadcast. The greeting from the officers in charge was rather restrained, not warm and cordial as those we had received in other camps. Suddenly the reason dawned on me. I was at the wrong army camp! The bus had continued on its way. My orchestra and I were still thirty



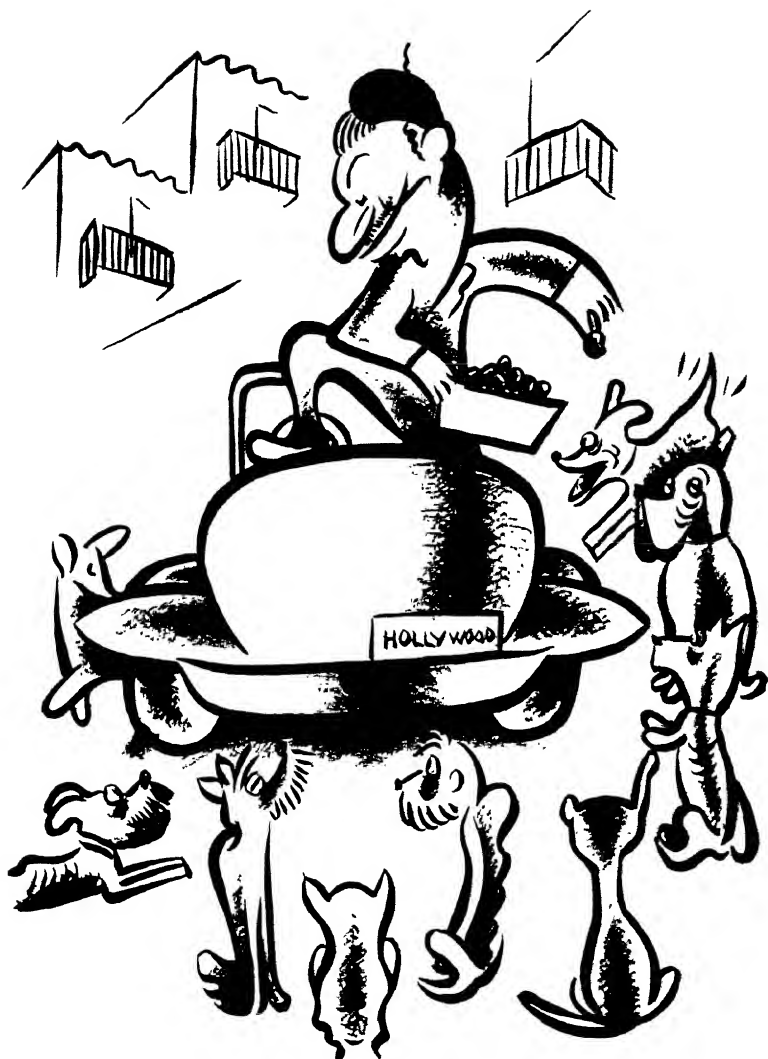
miles away from where we were supposed to broadcast. No transportation was available at this camp. I put in a phone call to the other camp which immediately dispatched five army trucks to pick us up and rush us over for our nationwide broadcast and camp entertainment. It seemed that no sooner had I hung up than the five army trucks already were there, so fast had they traveled. Going back to camp, they traveled even faster. To make up for lost time, we averaged seventy-five miles an hour. It was the wildest and fastest ride I ever experienced, but we did get to the right army camp safely, well in time for our scheduled program, with even time for a quick rehearsal.

I had notified the office in Radio City of the slip-up. They were prepared to use one of my recorded programs. It was not necessary, as events turned out, but later they did get to use one of the programs. Not in place of one of my own live broadcasts, however. One of the other bands sponsored by Coca-Cola got snowbound, and Radio City, not having a recorded program of this particular band, substituted one of mine in its place.

As I finished a broadcast at an army camp or naval base, I would put on an extra show for the servicemen. The high light of each show was a rumba contest. I would ask for volunteers from the audience, then offer a cash prize of twenty-five dollars to the winner to be judged by applause. As dancing partners, the servicemen had my vocalist, my dancer and the wives of some of the musicians.

The contest never failed to be the hit of the show.

Another contest I am reminded of concerns Harry James. He and his orchestra were also in the cast of "Two Girls and a Sailor," my first film for Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. A friendly rivalry existed throughout production. Harry, of course, was a rabid baseball fan and so, consequently, were the boys in his band. They had a soft ball team and challenged my orchestra to a game. Several of my men had never seen a soft ball, much less handled one, but my manager, Bob



*In Barcelona in the Pierce-Arrow tossing meat to  
the stray dogs.*



Diament, as fanatical about the national pastime as Harry, insisted that I accept the challenge. He promised to coach our boys. So I told Harry we would play his team. The game was quickly scheduled and although I, myself, did not play, Harry James was on first base for his team and Bob Diament played the same position for the Cugat Nine. The umpires, of course, spoke their own particular brand of English with the disastrous result that most of my Latin-American players could not understand what it was all about and became befuddled. Scrambled confusion resulted and a good thing it did, too. It was a sound excuse for the umpires to call off the game after four hour-long innings and save the Cugat Nine from further humiliation by the championship play of the Harry James team.

# 19

Beginning with September 3, 1939, when World War II officially started in Europe, all American tourist trade to the Continent and confines promptly stopped. On the happier side, Cuba, South America and the Central American countries immediately got the travelers. Due to this drastic change and ensuing switch in tourists' musical tastes, the popularity of my Latin-American music increased beyond belief. Upon returning to the United States, travelers wanted the same type of music they enjoyed in Cuba, South America and Central America. The demand for Latin-American music was prevalent throughout the states.

The rumba was more popular than ever. Dancing schools, specializing in it, flourished. Noro Morales and Carlos Molina, two of my devoted friends, headed the best of the numerous rumba bands enthralling the nation.

Each blade of grass had its drop of dew.

American dancers at last were convinced that the rumba was easy to do; that for a woman, it showed off her dress and figure to better advantage than any other dance.

I stressed Cuban music to the rewarding extent that I became one of only four who have been given the Grand Cross of Carlos Manuel de Cespedes, with the rank of commander, by the Cuban government. Mrs. Fulgencio Batista, wife of Cuba's president at the time, made the award given for my exploitation of her country.

As the vogue increased, a bewildering situation occurred in the music business. A music war was declared between ASCAP (American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers) and BMI (Broadcast Music Incorporated). Just

about every song, song writer, orchestra and broadcasting station was involved in the bitter but bloodless hostilities.

From January 1 to October 24, 1941, music controlled by the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers virtually was eliminated from the air, while most broadcasters used their own musical source, Broadcast Music Incorporated, established to combat the ASCAP monopoly at the National Association of Broadcasters convention in San Francisco on August 5, 1940.

The specialized music I played was not among the banned ASCAP songs. I was, in fact, the only band in the United States having an extensive music library that could be played on the air without any restriction. Instantly, I was besieged with a variety of radio offers from important sponsors. I selected the ten most advantageous accounts, assiduously made eliminations and then accepted Camel Cigarettes as my sponsor.

Previously, the overly cautious advertising agencies were not so sure that Cuban melodies would catch on outside of the big cities. The Hooper and Crosley ratings of my program for Camel Cigarettes eliminated all doubt. My music caught on as readily and as endearingly with the national radio audience as it had locally at the Waldorf-Astoria. My recordings for Victor doubled in sales. Requests for theater appearances tripled.

More than ever I was featuring Cuban music, since the public was considerably more familiar with it than with the music of other Latin-American lands, which was only natural. Since Cuba, easily accessible, had more trade and travel with this country than all of Central America combined, its customs and music were that much better known to Americans.

Most Cuban music, both instrumental and vocal, combines the Spanish and African influence. It is strangely rhythmical and difficult for foreigners to interpret. Among the accepted Cuban composers I admire are: Bousquet, White, Desver-

nine, Roldan, Arizti, Espadero, Simon, Grenet, Caturla, Albertini, Brindis, De Sala, Cervantes, Lecuona and Jimenez.

It has been my pleasure and good fortune to introduce in the United States the more important music of modern Latin-American composers, most of whom live in either Cuba or Mexico. Among the outstanding Cuban composers of today are Luciano Pozo, Arsenio Rodriguez, Margarita Lecuona and Julio Gutierrez. In Mexico, among the best known are Alberto Dominguez, Mario Alvarez, Cansuelo Velazquez, Agustin Lara and Tata Nacho. I know all of them personally. In their own countries, they are held in the same esteem Americans hold Irving Berlin, Cole Porter and George Gershwin.

In the case of "Perfidia," composed by Alberto Dominguez, I alone plugged it over the air waves because I personally knew the Mexican composer and felt he had a song worthy of whatever effort I could exert to push it toward success. One by one, other orchestras realized its possibilities and they in turn played it frequently until it became one of the biggest hits in the music business. "Perfidia" had what Beethoven had in mind when he said, "Music should strike fire from the heart of a man and bring tears from the heart of a woman."

An outstandingly talented pianist who worked with me was the late Raul Soler. He died in Hollywood while we were making "Holiday in Mexico." I found his body pathetically slumped over a writing table in his hotel room. On the table was a composition Raul was working on when death struck. He called it "Un Poquito de Amor." I played it in "This Time For Keeps."

Among my favorite Latin-American songs are the following: "Perfidia" by Alberto Dominguez, "Babalu" by Margarita Lecuona, "Negra Leono" by Antonio Fernandez, "Blen! Blen! Blen!" by Luciano Pozo, "Amor" by Gabriel Ruiz, "You're the Moment of a Lifetime" by Sergio de Karlo, "Noche de Ronda" by Maria Teresa Lara, "Cachita" by

Rafael Hernandez, "Frenesi" by Alberto Dominguez, "Blue Echoes" by Joe Farver, "Mexican Jumping Bean" by Rafael Hernandez, "Maria Elena" by Lorenzo Barcelata and "Loved One" by Gabriel Ruiz.

I have often felt that Lina Romay got off to so brilliant a start because of the song which I had her introduce—"Para Vigo Me Voy (Say, Si, Si)." It was one of Ernesto Lecuona's best.

Among dancers who have worked for me, incidentally, are Raoul and Eva Reyes, Georges and Jalna, Mario and Floria, the Vernons, and Antonio and Rosario. All of them are still my good friends. It is flattering to have them tell me that, in putting the full dress on rumba, I helped immeasurably in giving distinction to their dancing careers.

Oddly enough, the rumba is not the national dance of Cuba, contrary to general belief. The national dance of Cuba is the danzón. The rumba, of course, is actually the name for more than one dance. The son and danzón are both rumbas, the first is medium slow, the latter is very slow. In the danzón, you dance sixteen bars and rest sixteen bars. The young people popularized it in Cuba because they are not permitted to go out without a chaperone or talk alone, but with this dance they can stop and talk on the dance floor.

I have written over thirty compositions, the best received being "Take It Easy," "My Shawl," "Night Must Fall," "Nightingale," "One-two-three Kick," and "Rain in Spain."

Other favorite Latin-American dances with Spanish flavor are the picturesque fandango, the seductive habanera and the exciting bolero or seguidilla. The primitive dances include the guateja and the changui, a not-too-refined peasant dance.

Like certain American dance steps of Negro origin, most South American dances follow less a beat than a rhythmic pattern. This all goes back to African rhythms. The lively samba, hailed as a dance from Brazil, is actually another



ever, as I grew older. In fact, I became so annoyed and indignant at repeatedly hearing there was only one Kreisler, only one Heifetz, only one Elman, that I became determined to make people realize there was only one Cugat, too. Just how, I was not sure. But I knew it called for giving the public something no other performer gave. This I gradually accomplished with my unique Latin-American music.

I became a tango-rumba specialist, explored and perfected possibilities no other musician had bothered about. I separated the chaff from the musical wheat. I concentrated on tangos and rumbas with general American appeal, stressed the contagious Latin-American musical moods of depicting emotions.

In starting out, I had the luck of the Irish in finding five gifted musicians unsurpassed in the playing of Latin-American music. It got me off prodigiously. I had musicians definitely capable of exciting interest in Latin-American music in Peoria, Podunk or Paducah. Besides, I had the ancestral grit, determination and will to succeed. What more did I need? I put aside all else to concentrate on becoming the foremost exponent of Latin-American dance music. But as Ovid put it, "If thou wishest to put an end to love, attend to business, then thou will be safe."

Whatever longing I have to play classical music is satisfied in my concerts, for I present a program that embraces the classical as well as the popular.

Were I to relive my career, I would do precisely as I am now doing. I would not change a single sixty-fourth note.

I have steadfastly followed two simple rules: Employ the best people available. Treat subordinates as executives. I deal with people as cordially as I would expect them to deal with me. I am as polite to a Waldorf-Astoria elevator boy as I am to its president. I have the same cheery hello for its doorman as for Rene Black. Around motion picture, radio and recording studios I am diplomatically gregarious. I strive to make friends. I want everyone to like and remem-

ber me. He who is everybody's friend is either very poor or very rich.

People are my greatest pleasure, as my caricatures show. Since childhood I have been fascinated by people. I never spent time with books when I could listen to people. You often acquire knowledge easier in this manner than in reading. Concentrate on people and you get an extraordinary understanding of their likes and dislikes. For example, I know what the public likes in music. A smooth, stimulating, melodic blend of Latin-American music.

That—is Cugat.





